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SURE SHOT SETH, THE BOY RIFLEMAN;

OR,
The Young Patriots of the North.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "DELAWARE DICK," "HAWK-EYE HARRY,"
"BOLLO, THE BOY RANGER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPY IN THE LOG.

AN August night of the year 1862 hung over the forests of Minnesota.

The sky was overcast with a leaden-gray mist, and the pale moon looked feebly to earth.

The river rolled on through the purple shadows, whispering low and sullenly to the stately pines, its faithful sentinels of centuries gone.

The dreary, monotonous drone of insect wings seemed everywhere, and now and then the hoot of an owl boomed heavily through the night.

The breathings of reposing Nature came in pulsing sobs, as though under her fair and mighty bosom an aching, throbbing heart lay, conscious of the black cloud gathering on the horizon.

DROPPING THE BUTT OF HIS RIFLE TO THE GROUND, SURE SHOT SETH, THE BOY RIFLEMAN AND SPY, LISTENED.

Through the woods bordering on the Minnesota river, and contiguous to the Yellowstone Agency, a figure was gliding noiselessly along—a human figure—that of a boy with bright blue eyes and strong, prepossessing features. He was light in form and lithe of limb, and darted onward through the gloom as though it were his own element. He seemed perfectly familiar with his course, and dodged in and out of the tangled mazes of the grim old wood, and along the sinuous windings of the valleys like a hound upon the trail.

At length he drew up in the forest under some stately pines, where the darkness seemed to have been born of infinity. Dropping the butt of his rifle to the ground, Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman and Spy, listened.

"To-whit-to-whoo-hoo-oo-oo!" rung from the tree overhead.

Seth shook his head thoughtfully.

"I never like to hear an owl hoot," he said to himself, "for it's a bad sign."

He sat down on a hollow log, and after the owl's cry came a deep and profound silence—a silence that became painful and foreboding to the youth. But it lasted only a few minutes when that droning hum of Nature was resumed.

Sure Shot Seth breathed easier. He whistled softly to himself.

A frog croaked on the margin of the river.

A cricket chirped shrilly in the hollow log.

The wind whispered softly among the stately pines. A night-hawk screamed above the forest, then with that peculiar hollow boom of his wings, shot up into the sky.

Again the old owl overhead sent forth his hoarse notes quivering upon the air; and the sound was immediately followed by a scrambling among the branches, as upon heavy wing the bird went lumbering away through the night.

Then a silence profound as the grave followed.

"Ah," mused Seth, "that frightened cry and flight of the owl, and this terrible silence have a meaning."

He started to his feet as he spoke. He had been trained in the lore of the woods and night, and could read the sounds of each like an open book, and interpret their meaning and portents. There was a difference in the sound of a stealthy movement and one that was not, though both may have been equally loud. But it took an instinct trained in the school of practical experience to discriminate between them. This our fearless young hero possessed. The silence that succeeded the warning cry of that cowardly old sentinel of the night, the owl, convinced him that danger was approaching. He bent his head and listened intently.

Off in the direction of the river he heard the heavy tread of feet.

"They're comin', sure as death!" the youth said to himself, then he dropped to the ground and crept into the hollow log upon which he had been seated.

The footsteps approached and paused under the great pines within a few feet of the log. The boy knew they were the steps of booted feet, and had some idea to whom they belonged. He applied his eye to a knot-hole in his retreat, and peered out, but all was wrapped in Egyptian gloom. He pressed his ear to the orifice and listened. To and fro beneath the branching trees he heard the unknown clug with restless impatience.

Presently he heard voices in conversation, and then a faint beam of light streamed into the log.

He applied his eyes to the hole again, and, in the light of a pocket-lantern, saw four persons standing, and looking like Titan figures in the gloaming.

Three of them Seth recognized as the notorious Sioux chiefs, Little Crow, Inkpaduta, and Little Priest. The fourth was a white man, whose long hair, broad-brimmed hat, peculiar garb, and general appearance were characteristic of no other class of men than the wealthy planters of the Southern States.

"So you have kept your appointment," said the white man, raising the lantern and scanning each face before him with knitted brows.

"Little Crow is a great chief," said the redoubtable chief himself, "and never breaks his word with his friends."

The other two answered in the same words.

"I am glad to hear this, chiefs, for it gives me greater strength," replied the white man. "I have come from the sunny land of the South to confer with my red brothers; are they ready to listen?—are there no enemies' ears near us?"

"The trees have ears, and the wind sometimes tells secrets," answered Little Crow.

"Then you do not deem this a safe place to consult?"

"No; the night-jar screamed with affright, and shot into the sky when he passed near here. He is the spirit that warns the red-man when darkness hides dangers from his eyes. There are safer places than this to talk," replied the chief.

"Let my red brother select the safest place, that the ears of our enemies may not hear what we say," said the white man.

"A brave waits by the river-side to take us in his canoe whither we desire to go. Let us seek the solitude and well-guarded shores of the island in the river below. There can we talk in safety, for no enemy's ear can cross the water."

"It is well, great chief," answered the white plotter.

Disappointment clouded the face of the youth in the log as he heard the four emissaries of evil move away. But his quick brain soon suggested a new course of action, and, creeping from the log, he rose to his feet and glided away through the darkness, going in the direction of the river, but keeping wide of the four enemies.

He reached the bank much in advance of them. Then he stole softly down the river until he came in sight of the Indian and canoe spoken of by Little Crow.

The warrior sat in the boat with his blanket drawn over his head. A rifle lay on the thwart at his side.

The prow of the canoe lay partly upon the beach. The pale moonbeams, struggling downward through the darkness and mist, revealed all to the eyes of the young spy, as he crouched in the shadows near.

The keen ear of the savage boatman was on the alert. It detected a slight sound in the shrubbery. He started from his seat and fixed his eyes on the bushes before him. Then followed a "whirr," a dull, sodden blow; a groan; the rush of feet; a splash in the water; the dip of a paddle, and the prow of a boat cleaving the waters.

The moon hid her face behind a cloud as if with shame; while the river flowed on as merrily as though its waters had not been stained with human blood.

CHAPTER II.

THE LONE ISLAND CONFERENCE.

Slowly toward the river Little Crow and his three companions made their way.

The moccasined feet of the savages trod as lightly as a panther's; but the tramp of the white man gave ample notice of his approach. The red-skins glided under and around the brush that disputed their way, but, like an ox, their companion crashed his way through, much to their annoyance.

Finally they reached the river-bank a few rods above the canoe.

The moon uncovered her face and looked to earth once more.

The dip of a paddle arrested the Indians' ears.

Out upon the river Little Crow saw his boatman seated in the canoe, toying with the paddle. His head and shoulders were covered with his red and blue blanket.

The chief called to him. He headed the canoe ashore. As the prow touched upon the beach Little Crow courteously bade his white friend enter it.

The white man stepped into the craft, advanced and seated himself.

The boat was a long, slender affair, made of a log. The paddler occupied the stern; the white man a seat next, Little Crow third, and Inkpaduta the prow.

"Let Serleque head for the island below," said Little Crow, in a low tone.

Without a word the paddle dipped, the boat backed out from the shore, swung its long prow around, and then under the skillful management of Serleque, glided away down the stream.

Silence sealed the lips of the party. The white man gazed around him with a wild look of admiration upon his face. The moonbeams struggling through the white mist rendered objects weird and somber. The dark woods on either side rose up like the black walls of a mountain pass. Now and then a night-jar screamed overhead. The rolling waters surged and gurgled under and around them.

Bright flashed the dripping paddle in the moonbeams—light was its fall in the placid waters.

Swiftly onward through the waves glided the craft. In a few minutes more the island was reached. Inkpaduta, followed by Little Priest, Little Crow and the white man, landed. The boatman swung his boat alongside the little sand-bar, laid down his paddle and drew his blanket closer around his head.

The island was not over a rod in width by two in length. It was a barren sand-bar, yet well guarded by the waves on either side.

Little Crow spread his blanket upon the ground and invited the white man to be seated upon it. Then the chief sat down opposite him, while the other two chiefs sat down, one upon the right and one upon the left.

"Let our white brother speak, for we are now safe," said Little Crow.

The white man at once opened the conference; he represented himself as agent of the Southern Confederacy, then waging war against the Union. He claimed that he had been sent North to effect terms of compromise with the Sioux under Little Crow, and enlist their aid in battling their enemies, promising them a vast tract of territory in case victory crowned their arms. The chiefs listened closely to the propositions of the Southern agent, and after the latter had concluded, Little Crow arose and delivered a warm and eloquent speech. He set forth the wrongs they had suffered at the hands of the government, and expressed a belief that their grievances would justify them in taking up arms. He did not come to a final decision, however, until Inkpaduta and Little Priest had expressed themselves on the subject. When they had, and he found that they favored the agent's views, the great Sioux chief at once entered into an article of agreement with the agent to assist them in their battle against the Union. Even the very day and hour upon which the Indian massacre, so prominent on the pages of history, was to begin, were agreed upon by the chiefs and the agent before the conference ended. Altogether, an hour was consumed by these four arch-plotters, and finally they rose to depart. As they turned toward the boat, a cry of surprise burst from their lips. The boat had left the island and was half-way across to the shore.

Little Crow called to his boatman, but the latter made no reply. He pushed on and soon entered the border of shadows along the shore.

Then he permitted the mantle that enveloped his head and shoulders to fall to his feet, while a low, silent peal of laughter escaped his lips.

The boatman was Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Spy, not the Indian, as Little Crow believed.

From his covert in the woods, had Seth hurled a stone and stricken the Indian boatman down. Then he tossed the body overboard, enveloped himself in the savage's blanket, turned the boat away from the scene of the tragedy and paddled along the shore up-stream until halted by the chief coming down. And in this manner, the young spy possessed himself of the secret plot so soon to deluge the land in blood.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEATH TUSSELE.

SURE SHOT SETH turned and glanced back toward the island. He could see the four forms upon it, and hear the chief calling to Serleque, his boatman. Taking up his rifle from its concealment under the seat, he examined its priming, and was about to try a shot at one of the plotters when a sound in the water arrested his attention.

He gazed downward and to his horror beheld a human face peering up at him from the side of the boat. It was an Indian's face—the face of Serleque, the boatman. He had recovered from the blow he had received at the hands of the young spy, and was there to seek revenge. He stood in the water to his waist, and the instant his eyes met those of his foe, he threw up his hands and seized hold of the boat.

Seth saw, at a glance, that the savage had an advantage to begin with; and the first thing the youth did was to place his finger to his lips and utter a shrill, piercing whistle that fairly started the savage as its intonations quivered through the air.

Instantly, almost, it was answered in a similar manner from back among the hills, and then the savage knew that the young pale-face had friends near. But, not to be thwarted in his plans of vengeance, he rocked the canoe violently and pitched Seth out into the water. Then the two grappled in a deadly struggle—the red-skin and the white—the man and the boy. The former uttered a yell of savage fury, the latter a shout of defiance.

Although he was weak from recent loss of blood, the savage had no idea but that he could easily vanquish his youthful enemy; but the moment they grappled he found he had reckoned without his host, for the boy not only was possessed of wonderful strength, but the agility of a panther.

The red-skin had no weapons save those that nature gave him, Seth having deprived him of his knife and hatchet at the time of throwing him overboard. And his young adversary was no better provided, owing to the suddenness in which the conflict had been brought about; consequently the fight was confined to skill, strength and endurance. Seth made one or two attempts to draw his knife, and finally succeeded, but before he could use it, he was forced into such a position that he was compelled to drop it. This left him no recourse save in his skill and power.

Unfortunately for the youth the course of the action gravitated toward the center of the river, which fact gave the enemy another advantage in consequence of his height and the depth of the water. But brave, desperate and determined, the lad struggled manfully, heroically, giving the savage all he wanted to do. Their flying arms and feet beat and churned the water to a foam around them, as in rapid evolutions they whirled and spun to and fro in every direction. At times they would sink from view, the water boiling and surging over them, then pop up perhaps a rod from where they sunk; puffing and blowing with sheer exhaustion. Now and then they would cease their struggle for a moment to rest; but never relinquishing the hold upon each other.

During one of those lulls in the conflict, half a dozen shadowy figures glided from the woods, and pausing on the shore glanced up and down the stream. Then a voice called:

"Seth? Seth? where are you?"

"Here in a—"

The rest of the sentence was lost in the savage's yell and the renewal of the conflict.

"Boys," cried one of the party upon the shore, "Sure Shot is in peril."

"Yes! Yes!" responded the others.

"Beaver, Beaver!" exclaimed the first speaker, "that is your element—"

The lad addressed as Beaver uttered the peculiar cry of the fur-bearing animal of that name; then, divesting himself of his outer clothing, plunged into the water and struck out toward the struggling foes.

By this time Seth and the Indian had drifted out into the middle of the river, where the current was swift and strong. The element was an enemy that was no respecter of persons, and not only proved a great annoyance to the combatants, but threatened the lives of both, for they were under water a good portion of the time.

Beaver swam rapidly and with as much ease apparently as though the water was his home. When within a few rods of Seth and his antagonist when they rose to the surface from a long submersion, and to encourage his friend, he shouted:

"Brace up, Sure Shot; brace up, for I'm coming," and he ended with the sharp, piercing cry of the animal after which he had been named.

For a few moments they struggled in the swiftest part of the current; then spun rapidly across to the opposite shore, and disappeared among the hanging network of roots, laid bare by the wash of the waves. The Beaver knew they were out of the water by the sounds; but they were in blinding darkness. However, he was about to follow to the scene of conflict when he saw a dozen savage forms appear on the bank just over the combatants, and he was con-

pelled to change his mind. He remained perfectly still on the waves and watched. They walked to the edge of the bank and looked over, but not seeing the foes, one of them dropped himself down into the river and crept under the bank to his friend's assistance.

The next moment a cry of agony issued from under the bank; then all became still.

The battle was ended, but who had been the victor?

The Beaver, slowly drifting down the river unseen by the savages, held his breath in suspense.

The next moment a figure crept out from under the bank, and climbing up into the moonlight, brandished aloft a human scalp, at the same time uttering a fierce, triumphant war-whoop.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WRONG SCALP AND THE BOY BRIGADE.

THE BEAVER drifted slowly down the river beyond danger, then sought the shore and his companions. "Boys," he said, sad and heavy-hearted, "our gallant young leader is gone. The accursed savages were too much for him. Poor Seth! his scalp is the first of the long-threatened troubles."

A groan of the deepest anguish was wrung from the lips of each of the little band of youths—followers of Sure Shot Seth. Dearly they loved their young leader, and his death fell heavily upon their young hearts. But, all that was now left for them to do was to search out the body, give it a respectful burial, and go on with sad and heavy hearts with the duties of life assigned them.

They held a short consultation in the edge of the woods among the shadows; and as the Indians had left the opposite shore, they concluded to embark in the canoe, that lay on the beach before them, in quest of Seth's body. But at this very moment the Indians came back, terribly excited, on the opposite shore, and at the same instant the boys discovered that a large party was also approaching on their side from above.

"Scatter, boys!" exclaimed one of the party, and the next moment all disappeared like a shadow before a burst of sunshine.

A savage yell rung through the forest—a yell, the like of which had not been heard for a long time in that region.

It was a blood-curdling war-whoop!

Away through the forest like hounds glided the shadowy forms of the savages, their treacherous hearts thirsting for human blood.

Here and there, every boy taking care of himself, glided the followers of Sure Shot Seth. With the silence of panthers they crept among the bushes, dodged around the trees and rocks, and stole onward through the woods and darkness.

Suddenly the sharp bark of a fox broke upon the night. One of the fleeing youths started as though a bullet had whistled past his ears. He stopped, bent his head and listened. Again the barking of the fox broke upon his ears. A smile of happy surprise burst over his face, and clear and distinct he heard an exact imitation of the sound he had heard. Then he glided away in the direction whence the barking had emanated. He moved briskly, yet with silence, keeping the one course in a "bee-line." He had gone nearly a hundred yards when a low voice hailed him:

"Hullo; is it you, Reynard?"

"Great heavens!" was the excited answer; "do my ears deceive me? or do I hear the voice of Sure Shot Seth?"

"I am here, Reynard," was the response, and Sure Shot Seth stepped from a cluster of bushes and confronted his friend.

"Well, by the Lord Harry!" exclaimed Reynard, "there's a big mistake somewhere. Why, Seth, we mourned you as dead. That savage flourished a scalp aloft when he came from under the bank and uttered a triumphant scalp-cry."

"I know he did, the deluded fool; but the fact is, he took the scalp of a friend. He succeeded in getting his knife out just as I discovered that a second red-skin had appeared on the scene, and by a sudden movement I brought my enemy into such a position as to receive the knife of his friend in his heart. The savage knew not but that it was me, and tearing off his scalp, rushed out and climbed up the bank in great glee with a comrade's scalp, leaving me to make my way out at leisure. But are the other boys about, Reynard?"

"Yes; they are scattered through the woods, and not a few red-skins are after them. But, Seth, what did you discover to-night? Were the chiefs in council with that Southern agent?"

"Yes; and I discovered all I wanted to—that the red-skins have dug up the hatchet, and that the Yellow Medicine Agency, Fort Ridgely, New Ulm and the Lower Agency are all marked for destruction. The good settlers of these places must be put upon their guard at once; and so I will call the Brigade, and then turn our faces in that direction. Whippowill whippowill!"

The last two words whistled from his lips in an exact imitation of that night-bird, whose peculiar song seems very plainly to articulate the syllables which compose its own name. A moment later a similar answer was given; and still a few moments later, a figure emerged from the shadows into the little opening where Seth and Reynard stood in waiting.

"Ay, friend Whippowill!" cried Seth, extending his hand.

"Blessed Virgin!" exclaimed the youth in the Celtic brogue, "and, bedad, and I'm glad to mate ye, Seth, me b'y."

The three soon relapsed into silence; then Seth uttered a cry like that of a beaver, and was soon answered in a similar manner. A few moments af-

terward, the lad, Beaver, who had swam to Seth's assistance, joined the group, beside himself with joy.

Then Seth sent forth the hoot of an owl, the howl of a wolf, and the scream of a panther; and, in answer to the calls, three more youths made their appearance, and joined the group amid the wildest rejoicing.

And then and there in that wildwood opening were assembled seven youths, differing as widely from each other as nature could make them; yet joined together as if bound by all the ties of a sacred brotherhood. By profession they were trappers, and were known as the Boy Brigade. Each represented some different nationality, or peculiarity. There was an Irish, German, African, and Indian youth in the party, the others being Americans. All had been reared in the woods, and amid the wild dangers of the border. As a party, they were as one; but individuality made them as different in tastes and notions as seven persons could well be. While one liked to trap the beaver, another would rather hunt the fox, or the wolf, or the deer. And it was the same way with the sounds they heard. While one loved to hear the plaintive song of the whippowill, another found more music in the jarring hoot of an owl. Thus, by their different pursuits and respective eccentricities, had each come into possession of a sobriquet by which he was known to the band.

Seth March, the leader of this Boy Brigade, was called Sure Shot, in consequence of his unerring marksmanship.

Justin Gray was the Beaver. He made that animal a special object in hunting and trapping.

Teddy O'Roop loved the song of the whippowill, and the name of that bird was given him.

Baldwin Judd became Reynard, the fox, after having caught a number of those animals.

Tim Tricks, the African youth, being cook, became Black Pan.

The Owl was the big-eyed, round-faced German lad.

Hoosah, the Indian boy, answered to the name of Le Subtle Wolf. The name was not given him because he had any particular love for that animal, but because his movements were as sly and cunning in "bagging" game as the wolf's in taking prey. The glossy skin of a wolf was part of his dress.

These names and their emblems were but boyish whims; yet all had become familiar in the local history of Minnesota; for the Boy Brigade was an organization of its kind unsurpassed even by men of age and experience. The oldest of the party was nineteen, the youngest sixteen. Sure Shot Seth, their leader, was eighteen, and yet possessed all the developments of perfect manhood. As a trapper, he had no peer; and it was with no feeling of envy or reluctance that he was chosen leader of the little band of boys, who, early thrown upon their own resources, chose the exciting, adventurous calling of the trapper. For two years their business had been one of undisputed profit and pleasure, but now the threatened Indian war would put an end to it; but they accepted all in the spirit of true heroism, and decided to stand and fight by those who had stood by them in days gone by.

Their mission for the night having ended, the Boy Brigade bent their steps southward.

Rapidly, and yet silently, they made their way through the trackless forest. Mile after mile was traversed, until finally they drew up in front of a long, low, double cabin built of logs, and standing in the heart of a deep, dense wilderness of mighty pines. It was the home of the Brigade; and here, inside and out, was evidence of no little culture and refinement.

The odor that pervaded the atmosphere was not that of the wildwoods alone; but the mingled fragrance of wild flowers filled the air. The cabin was overrun with honey-suckles and morning-glories, and a dozen other flowers, all carefully cultivated by the boys, contributed their sweetness to that delicate sense of refinement so seldom found among the rude children of the border. The cabin door was approached through a long, shady arbor of wild cucumber vines, where the hot days of summer were passed on the grass-plot beneath the sylvan shade.

The little band filed down this avenue of green, fragrant verdure, and paused before the door. Seth raised the latch, pushed open the door, and entered. His companions followed him across the threshold. All was gloom in the cabin, but, halting in the center of the room, Seth sniffed the air, then exclaimed:

"Boys, what do you smell?"

"Tobacco, by the Howly Virgin!" exclaimed the Whippowill, and all repeated his answer.

"That's it," answered Seth, "and as none of us ever use the weed, some stranger has been here smoking. Quite a liberty to take in other people's house."

A candle was at once lit, and as its light dispelled the gloom, the boys glanced hastily about them to see if the intruder had taken liberties with their cabin. But all was as they had left it.

The cabin was divided into two rooms by a partition of logs, and the one the boys first entered was used as a kind of sitting-room. The walls were hung with fancifully-wrought robes and furs, and adorned with the stuffed skins of beautiful birds and small animals. Over each door were the branching antlers of an elk, among which were coiled monstrous spotted serpents. On a table in one corner was a number of time-worn books—books of the very best kind for the young mind; and, in addition to this source of mental culture and pastime, a violin and harp hung upon the wall.

The young trappers set aside their weapons, and seating themselves, entered into conversation. The conference, to which Seth had been an auditor,

formed the general topic of discussion. That an Indian war was inevitable, they had not a doubt; and as it would be impossible for them to continue tripping, they decided to gather in their traps, dispose of their stock on hand, and vacate the Hermit Hut, as the place was called, and take up arms against the savage. At least this was the decision of most of the party, a few evading a direct answer as to their future course. Seth noticed this hesitation with no little surprise, but said nothing. He resolved to let the matter rest until morning, then insist for a direct answer from all.

"Boys," said Seth after they had discussed the different topics of interest, "this is probably the last night we will be here, and so let us have some music, and a final merry-making."

All acquiesced, and the Indian lad, Le Subtle Wolf, having been placed on guard outside, Tim Tricks took down the fiddle and Sure Shot Seth the harp.

The first named led off with a sprightly air, and when Seth struck up the cabin fairly trembled under the violent strains of music. The Whippowill became inspired by the ravishing notes, and, springing to his feet, executed a dance that greatly increased the interest of the moment.

"Good for the wild Irishman," exclaimed his companions, when, with a sudden movement, he turned a summersault and came up on a seat at the opposite side of the room.

"Och, and a broth av a b'y was me aged grandad on a jig; and begorra the rift came down through the whole ginnershins of O'Roops with various improvements. But, give us a march, b'ys, somethin' to rouse the blood that fit at Bunker's Hill—somethin' military—ay, some martial moosic, that's the jigger."

Tim Tricks and Seth were both fine musicians, and, in accordance with the Whippowill's request, struck up the "Grand Russian March," much to the delight of their auditors.

The music swelled out in enchanting melody, and, with its varying notes, the blood of the youths glided through their veins in symphony with the soul-stirring strains.

The scene was one seldom met with under similar circumstances. In the flickering, changing light dancing over the walls, the dead birds and animals that ornamented the humble home of these trapper boys seemed aquiver with life and ready to stir from their perch, enchanted by the music. The youthful faces of the lads glowed with the emotions stirred within their breasts, and their senses seemed floating away on the ravishing sounds called forth by the skillful hands of the performers. But in the midst of all, while every mind was diverted from the cares of the outside world, and absorbed in the sweet melody of music, a dark body suddenly dropped from above in the middle of the floor with a dull, heavy thud, and something bright upon it glinted in the light.

The music ceased, and the boys started to their feet with an involuntary exclamation of horror.

In the room before them stood a powerful savage, his head shaven, his face in war paint, and wreathed in a sinister smile of diabolical triumph.

There was no loft in the room, and, glancing upward, the boys saw an opening had been made in the roof during the musical entertainment, and, before they had time to act, a second savage swung himself down into the room and confronted the young hunters. He was immediately followed by a third, a fourth, and so on, until six powerful warriors stood in the middle of the house, facing the Boy Brigade, with their hands upon their weapons. A devilish smile of triumph upon their faces, and a murderous intent in their hearts.

CHAPTER V.

THE STRUGGLE IN THE HUT.

FOR FULLY a minute a speechless silence reigned in the Hermit Hut, the savages eyeing the boys, and the latter exchanging glances with one and another. Had the red-skins entered the door as had been their wont in days past, the boys would not have mistrusted them of murderous designs. But their war-paint, and every feature of the face, and the black ferret-eyes, bespoke the evil, murderous purpose in their hearts.

Sure Shot Seth was the first to speak.

"Why do our red friends not come in at the door as they used to?" he asked, calmly.

"Why do the pale-face boys stand a guard near the door?" was the savage spokesman's reply; "they didn't use to do this."

Seth was puzzled for an answer to this savage retort. The fact of their having placed one of their number on guard outside was evidence of their fears of danger, for not once in the two years past had they ever been compelled to take this precaution.

"We placed a guard near the door," Seth finally answered, "because we have heard that the Indians and whites have dug up the hatchet and were going to war with each other."

"And are not the trapper-boys of the Hermit Hut the friends of the whites?" asked the savage, with a sardonic smile.

"We are the friends of all—both red and white. The red-skins have broken bread with us as often as the whites since we came to the Hermit Hut. If there is trouble between the Sioux and the whites, we can be neutral."

"The white boy's tongue is crooked. He knows he will fight the Sioux. When he came into the cabin, we were on the top of his wigwam and heard him talk."

In an instant all flashed through the boy's mind. During their absence the Indians had climbed to the

roof of the cabin, and were there concealed when they came in. They saw there was no compromising with them—that a conflict was inevitable.

The Brigade had deposited all their rifles in one corner, and edging around by degrees, the savages managed to get themselves between the boys and the guns, believing that they were in possession of no other weapons. But in this the red-skins were mistaken. Each of the boys was possessed of a small revolver, and which, at close quarters, would be the most desirable weapon. The youths felt no fears of the number that confronted them; but that others might be waiting outside to join them in case of a collision.

The savages were armed with the deadliest weapons—the tomahawk and scalping-knife. But none of them were drawn, and a movement of a hand to the belt would be a signal for the boys to precipitate the conflict.

Each boy was actuated as if by a single impulse. The threatened danger forced measures in common upon each mind; and having exchanged glances with their leader, all stood ready to fire the first shot ever fired in anger, or with deadly intent upon a human being.

It was a momentous hour in the lives of the young Brigade—started from the sweet, rapturous enjoyment of music into the presence of death. Yet they faced the savages—great, powerful, athletic fellows that they were—with a cool, calm determination that in a measure awed the sanguine audacity of the Sioux.

For half a minute a lull—such as precedes the violence of the storm—fell upon the two lines of enemies, though each form seemed to tremble with the emotions that were pent up within it.

Seth had, adroitly, yet without any apparent motion whatever, transferred his hands to his breeches pockets, in the right of which he always carried his revolvers, it being more convenient.

His friends saw this movement, and comprehended its meaning at once, though it never entered the Indians' brains that his movement was other than a manifestation of peace; and as the youth's companions assumed positions and attitudes that brought their right hands in juxtaposition with their revolvers, a savage spoke:

"We will not kill the boy trappers if they will go quietly as prisoners to the village of Little Crow."

"We haven't the least assurance of this," answered Seth, "for we have found the Sioux to be treacherous as the moccasin snake."

"For these words shall the pale-face boy die," replied the chief, not using his tomahawk. But, before he could release the weapon, the hand of the young trapper-boy was withdrawn from his pocket and extended toward the savage's face. There was a flash and report simultaneously, and the warrior, with a deep groan of horrible pain, started back; his face contorted with agony and his muscles quivering, he fell like an ox upon the floor. A round hole in his forehead bearing the powder-marks around its edges told where the unerring bullet had struck.

This was a signal for a general attack, and the clash of five other revolvers rung out sharp and stunning on the night. Every savage went down before the deadly weapons, and victory seemed but the labor of an instant for our friends; but in the moment of their bloodless triumph, a fiendish yell outside the door burst from the lips of a score of red-skins; the door was flung open, and the yelling demons rushed into the cabin like a tornado.

Turning on his heel, as the door burst from its hinges, Sure Shot Seth fired at the candle, snuffing out the light as completely as though done by a gust of wind!

Then the revolvers of the boy-trappers were turned toward the door, and a constant stream of fire flashed in the faces of the savages. The groans of the dying wretches were mingled with the crack of the revolvers, the sodden fall of heavy bodies, and the tumbling of the excited savages over their fallen comrades as they rushed into the darkened room.

The boy-trappers gradually edged around toward the door leading into the opposite room; and as each one emptied the last chamber of his revolver, he passed out to the adjacent apartment. Not a word escaped the lips of our young friends, and one by one their revolvers became silenced; but whether it was by death, or by being emptied, each could tell nothing regarding his comrade.

The danger was not all on the side of the savages, for the moment the light was put out, they began throwing their tomahawks, clubs and knives in every direction; and their clash and thud fell thick as hail against the walls. But the confusion was so great and deafening that the savages could tell nothing of the result of their attack.

Finally the tumult became hushed; a light was obtained by the savages; and then it was that they beheld the terrible loss they had already sustained. Madded by the sight of their dead braves, they sought the foe in the adjoining room, but the scene of battle had been transferred to the open air. In front of the cabin the boy-trappers met a number of savages as they passed out, and here another conflict ensued.

"Boys," cried Sure Shot Seth, "make for the woods!—every fellow for himself!"

A moment later there seemed to be a perceptible pause in the struggle as the sound of the conflict spread out in all directions, and yells of savage vengeance rung through the forest. By these sounds Sure Shot Seth knew that his men had obeyed orders, and that all the survivors were seeking safety by flight to the woods. But how many had fallen? This was the question that now rose in the young trapper's mind as he pursued his lonely way through the dark and gloomy wilderness. When assured

that he had eluded his pursuers, Seth stopped and sat down upon a log.

All noise of the late conflict was left behind, and unbroken silence pervaded the night, and gradually animated nature began her myriad of sounds, and soon the great lungs of the sleeping world were sending forth their pulsing, throbbing respirations.

Sure Shot Seth grew easier now. He knew by the sounds that came to his ear that no danger was lurking near. The acute ear of the experienced woodman can read the voices of nature as though spoken in an intelligible dialect. Through force of habit he becomes accustomed to his surroundings, and intuitively learns by instinct the language of both animate and inanimate nature, for inanimate nature has a language, and one that never deceives. The chirp of a cricket, the hum of insect wings, the piping of a tree-frog, and the patter of the velvet feet of night-prowling beasts, all mingle and produce a weird, monotonous drone that instinctively inspires one with a feeling of solitude; and this feeling assures him that no enemies, or friends, for that matter, are moving about. On the contrary, if all is silent and dead, it is a warning that danger lurks near—that, conscious of the murderous intent of the skulker, nature hushes her song.

It was the assurance that no danger lurked near that gave Seth relief; and when satisfied that he could do so with impunity, he gave utterance to the sharp bark of the fox.

Instantly he was answered in a similar manner from among the hills.

"Reynard, the Fox, lives," the young leader said; then he uttered the cry of the beaver, and was answered.

Then changing his position, he gave utterance to the scream of a panther, the howl of a wolf, the hoot of an owl, and the cry of a whippoorwill. All answered but one.

"As I live!" soliloquized Seth, "the boys all answered but the Indian, Le Subtile Wolf. Can it be that he has been slain?"

Hooseah was a brave and fearless youth, with but little of the savage in his nature. He was a Chippewa by birth, and had spent all his days among the whites, coming from northern Michigan when quite a lad; so there was no danger to apprehend of his want of fidelity to the whites. Seth was satisfied that he had either been killed or else had not heard his call. He did not repeat it through fear of confusion, or of increasing their danger.

Moving further back into the woods, Seth finally sat down in a dense thicket of shrubbery, leaned against a tree and went to sleep. This was not a very commendable act for a borderman, but Seth knew that no danger could befall him there in such a lonely and desolate spot. Moreover, he was almost exhausted with his night's adventure, and nothing but sleep could restore the much-needed strength, and drive away the dizzy whirl of the brain.

It was just growing light when he awoke. He could see the dusky outline of the tree-trunks around him, and leaning against one of these, motionless as the tree itself, he saw the outlines of an Indian warrior!

CHAPTER VI.

A QUEER OLD CUSTOMER.

SETH started to his feet, half bewildered and half terrified at sight of the savage standing over him.

To his surprise, however, he saw that the Indian did not move, and a second thought and second glance removed a terrible weight from the youth's mind; for he now recognized the red-skin as his friend, Hooseah, or Le Subtile Wolf. The Indian lad was standing there asleep. It was the way a Chippewa slept on the war-path.

Seth glanced around him, and on the opposite side of the same tree against which he had reclined he saw the form of Justin Gray, the Beaver, curled up in a sound slumber; and under another tree not far away the form of Black Pan, the African, stretched at full length along the ground.

Seth gave utterance to the shrill cry of a bird, then in a clear voice called out:

"Le Subtile Wolf!"

"Ugh! me here," muttered the lad, starting from his slumber.

"Justin Gray?"

"Here."

"Tim Tricks?"

"Here I is, ole boss."

"Baldwin Judd?"

"Here," came from in the bushes.

"Teddy O'Roop?"

"Here, bedad."

"Mort Schultz?"

"I here ish."

And as each one answered to his name, he emerged from among the shadows and stood before his young leader, Sure Shot Seth.

"Thank God, we are all permitted to meet again," said Seth.

This was the point designated as a rendezvous before leaving the cabin when the savages were pouring in upon them; hence the remarkable manner under which they all met.

The marks of a restless night, and of excitement, were upon each face; yet no look, word or movement betrayed the least sign of fear. Nobly had the youths fought their way through a terrible danger, and now as they stood congratulating each other on their miraculous escape—while the red dawn of the rosy morn was bursting into light around them a shrill, sharp voice suddenly cried out:

"Here!"

The boys started as though a torpedo had ex-

ploded in their midst. They glanced around them, then at another, a look of wild astonishment upon each face.

"Here!" again shouted the unknown voice, and the sound was followed by an outburst of rollicking laughter.

It came from overhead, and raising their eyes, the young bordermen saw that which forced an involuntary exclamation from their lips. Attached to a limb of the wide-spreading oak was a sort of a rude hammock made of a blanket, and over the end of this the quaint, comical face of an old man looked down upon them.

He was about twenty or thirty feet above them, and his hammock was attached to a limb that grew straight out from the body of the tree yet slender enough to give it a gentle, swaying motion.

This old stranger was a man of nearly threescore years; yet the bright luster of his mischievous gray eyes, and the smile upon his thin, bearded face, told of a youthful, buoyant spirit. His nose was of a strong Roman type—a type indicative of indomitable courage. Considerable severity was betrayed in the thin lips, yet the general features of the man were the embodiment of humor, eccentricity and drollery.

"I'm in at roll-call, too," he exclaimed, in a whimsical tone; "sound the reveille, beat the drum, and rat-tat-too, for day has broke, the birds are astrir, and the devil's to pay."

"Will, now!" exclaimed Teddy O'Roop, "and what fur a baste have we got there now?"

"Hello, boggy-tongue," answered the man, with a comical smile, as he turned over on his stomach in his hammock and gazed complacently down upon the Brigade, while he kicked up his heels like a listless school-boy lying in the shade. "I should think you could see that I'm not a 'possum up here; nor that I'm not an oriole in a hangin' nest, but a full-fledged rooster of the genus man who roosts high and dry."

"We observe that you are rather elevated in your ideas of repose," said Seth.

"Elevated, did ye say?" replied the man; "Jews and Gentiles! that's no name for it. It's perfectly delicious up here. You see, I've slept around on the yearth with bugs, and snakes, and tortles, and bears, and wolves, and Indians, and snails, and alligators, crawling over and snifflin' round me long enough; and so I come to the conclusion that I'd hang myself up in a tree after'ds; and I find its delicious swaying in the breeze while the beasts of the field roam beneath, and the birds of the air sail above me. I'm old Joyful Jim Tucker, a brother of the veritable Daniel who had a Darby lamb; and so I'll jist come from my chamber in the air, and quiz you chaps a bit."

The man stepped out upon a limb, unfastened his hammock, took a rifle and its accoutrements from among the thick foliage above his head, and then descended to the ground. He shook hands with the boys all around, then said:

"S'pose you chaps are on the war-path?"

"Can't say that we are, exactly, though we had quite a fight last night with savages at our cabin, and were routed, though we lost no men."

"You don't mean to say that you compose Sure Shot Seth's Boy Brigade, that's been ranch'n at the Hermit Hut?" exclaimed Joyful Jim.

"We're the Boy Brigade," answered Seth.

"Judas and Benedict Arnold! Why, boys, I was just on my way to your ranch."

"From where?"

"Minnesota in general; you see I've been doin' a little tradin' up here among the Ingins for the past few years. I've been tradin' 'em beads, pocket-knives and 'doctored water,' for peltries; but as they've dug up the hatchet, I concluded to make myself seldom in their midst, and so pointed nose for the Hermit Hut. And so they've routed you hoss and foot!"

"They came upon us ten to one."

"They did? Wal, then, that's no denyin' blood and war are upon us; and so I perpose to have a hand in it. If the critters hadn't confiscated all my stock, I'd been easier onto 'em; but now I perpose to let 'em know that I weren't eddicated in the city. I'll jist sail right into 'em, boot and toe-nail, and I'll bet the rust Ingins I'll tackle 'll hear som'thin' gurgle."

"Faith, and wouldn't somethin' gargle if yees should tackle a jug av poteen, Joyful Jimmie, eh now?" said Teddy.

"Irishman, do you take me for a drunkard? Do you s'pose if I had a gallon of 'oh-be-joy-ful' that I wouldn't let you have half of it? What do you take me for, anyhow?"

"Yow-oo-oi!" suddenly rung in a low quavering echo through the woods.

Every boy started as if shot.

"It is Le Subtile Wolf," said Seth, who, for the first time, noticed the absence of the Indian from their midst; "it means danger."

"Then s'pose we obscure ourselves," suggested the trader, and the party at once concealed themselves, Joyful Jim selecting a thicket some distance from the boys. They had scarcely done so ere a savage in war-paint came stealing slyly as a panther through the woods, his eyes and ears on the alert, and his body bent slightly forward as if to give intensity to the precaution he was observing.

Joyful Jim, who was not concealed from the Brigade entirely, turned and glanced toward the boys with a comic grimace and a wink, and shook his head as if ready to burst with suppressed laughter.

"Och, and the oul' bla'gard'll not keep still," said Teddy, in a whisper.

"No danger of his betraying us," returned Seth.

"I think he can be trusted."

The red-skin advanced slowly, cautiously. He was pursuing a course that, if continued, would take him

within two paces of the trader, and our young friends experienced no little uneasiness for the old man's safety. They could see the trader as he stood erect behind the shrubbery, his hands outstretched before him as if to part the bushes.

The savage stole on, and when opposite the thicket he was started with all the sudden fright and ferocity of a surprised tiger. He turned his head and saw the bushes part before him, and the face of the fearless old Joyful Jim appear in the opening.

"Howdy?—mornin' to ye, red-skin!" exclaimed the trader, with a desperate grin.

The savage started back with a grunt, while a look of demoniac ferocity mounted his painted face. His hand sought the knife at his girdle, but before he could use it, the bony fist of the trader shot through the shrubbery, and striking the warrior in the face, felled him to the earth. Then with a shout, the old man sprang from his covert upon the savage and engaged him in a hand-to-hand struggle. The battle waxed warm and desperate, but in the hottest of the contest, the red-skin gave a wild yell, that was immediately answered by a dozen friends, not far distant; and the next moment eight or ten warriors came darting through the woods toward the scene of battle.

"Let them have it, boys!" exclaimed Seth: "we're in for another fight."

Scarcely had he spoken ere the rifles of the Boy Brigade rung out on the clear morning air, and half of the advancing savages fell dead.

CHAPTER VII.

GIVING THE RED-SKINS "TITS."

The instant the Boy Brigade fired, those of the red-skins that did not fall dodged behind the nearest trees and at once opened a sort of a random fire. The boys, however, had also availed themselves of the cover of trees, and while they could render Joyful Jim no assistance in his struggle, they resolved that no assistance should come to his antagonist. There was little danger of old Jim receiving a shot from the savages under cover, for the rapid evolutions of the two made it dangerous, to friend as well as foe, to fire upon them. The only hopes of each party lay in keeping the other at bay until the contest should be decided between the two combatants themselves.

Sure Shot Seth was without a gun, but with a pistol in hand, kept an eye on the enemy, the nearest of whom were not eighty yards away.

Joyful Jim and his antagonist seemed to have taken each other at a disadvantage, and so labored in the conflict. In rapid evolutions they whirled in each other's embrace. The hold of each was exactly the same. The old trader's right arm pinioned the savage's left, and the savage's right pinioned the old man's left. Jim, however, finally succeeded in getting hold of the red-skin's long scalp-lock, which hung down his back; and by pulling severely upon this appendage, drew the savage's head back in such a manner as to render him almost helpless. The savage uttered a hoarse, rattling cry when he saw that his foe was gaining upon him, and his cry reaching the ears of his friends, created a lively stir among them. By every device known to their cunning brains they tried to draw the Brigade from its covert. But they had met their match, and failed in every attempt.

Meanwhile, firing was heard in the woods some distance to the south, and that Hooseah, the young Chippewa was in trouble, the Brigade had not a doubt; but none of them dare attempt to leave, for every tree that concealed one of them was marked by a savage eye and covered by a savage rifle.

Finally, however, the Indians saw that their friend was getting the worst of the conflict, and that something must be done. With a yell that might have intimidated less brave hearts than those of the Boy Brigade, the Sioux dashed from their covert and darted toward the combatants reeling as they ran, to avert the bullets of the enemy.

But the Boy Brigade was ready for any emergency, and having discharged their rifles, bounded from their concealment and met the foe by the two struggling combatants, over whom a desperate conflict ensued.

The Boy Brigade now had an opportunity to call into practical use their skillful, athletic training; and right lively did they exert themselves—leaping, whirling and darting through the air so rapidly and swiftly that the eye could scarcely follow their movements.

Teddy O'Roop, as he came up near the red-skins, turned a complete hand-spring and shot himself forward with such force that his feet, coming in contact with a savage's stomach, sent him breathless to the earth.

Balwin Judd, or Reynard, the Fox, leaped into the air over a savage's head and planted his feet in the red-skin's face with great violence, while Tim Tricks, the dandy, dropped his bullet-head, shot forward as if ejected from a catapult, and drove it into the stomach of a red-skin, doubling him up on the earth.

Taken thus, the red-skins were unprepared to meet the flying enemy, as it were. They were completely confused and astounded by the flying, whirling, derting, tumbling forms around them. Heads, hands, fists and forms shot higher and thither in dizzy confusion; and ere the red-skins were aware of the fact, the Boy Brigade was master of the situation. Two of the savages had been slain, and the rest knocked breathless to the earth and secured before they could offer resistance.

By this time Joyful Jim had ended the conflict between himself and the savage, and had come out victor without even a wound of any consequence.

The firing heard a few minutes previous had ceased, and the shout of victory that rung from Old Jim's lips was answered by another from the

lips of Hooseah, the Indian lad, who, at this juncture, came bounding into the midst of his friends, followed by a strange lad and brandishing above his head a Sioux scalp.

"Great shockin'!" exclaimed Old Jim, "here's this bloody Turk with a red-skin scalp. Who says you can civilize or tame an Indian?"

"It's an Indian's nature to scalp, and I presume you can't preach it out of him," said Sure Shot Seth; "but who have you here, Hooseah?" and he turned to the white lad accompanying him.

"Ed Thornly," answered the youth himself.

"Ed Thornly? Haven't I seen you at Yellow Medicine?"

"Yes; I reside there; you are Sure Shot Seth, I believe?"

"The same," answered our hero.

"Then my mission is at an end, though I thought for awhile the Indians had ended it this morning for me when they captured me. Thanks to your red friend here I was liberated."

"Then you were on your way to the Hermit Hut?"

"Yes—totally ignorant of the fact that the Indians had begun their depredations. But I am here to see you, Seth, on a little matter concerning us boys at the Agency. To-morrow we are to have a shooting-match there for boys. A fine rifle is to be the prize. There is some rivalry between Tom Grayson and Ivan Le Clercq, the two best shots at the place; but on the part of the latter it is not a friendly rivalry. He has already resorted to foul means to defeat Tom, whom the majority of the people like. By the mean advantage already gained, it is feared that Le Clercq will win, so we boys held a meeting and concluded to send for you, and have you take some of the conceit and self-arrogance out of that fellow. I have a request here, signed by nearly all the boys in the Agency, for you to come down and scoop Le Clercq out."

Seth's eyes brightened as Ed presented him the paper, upon which were a number of names. It was a concession to his superior marksmanship, and he felt proud of the honor thus conferred upon him by the Agency boys. He could, under no circumstances, decline, and expressed his surprise at the honor bestowed upon him, and promised Ed that he would be on hand at the shooting-match.

"I'll teach your friend, Ivan, a lesson he has never learned in handling firearms," he said, "and, as I am without a rifle now, it will be a kind of a Godsend to get a new one. Yes, you can tell Tom Grayson that I'll be there."

The whole band now moved southward, accompanied by Ed Thornly and Joyful Jim, the reputed Indian trader.

That night they encamped ten miles from the Agency. Ed Thornly went on home alone, but under cover of the darkness.

Bright and early the next morning Sure Shot Seth left the Brigade and set out for Yellow Medicine to fulfill his engagement at the shooting-match.

Shortly after his departure the Brigade struck a fresh Indian trail leading toward the south-west, and feeling fully satisfied that the enemy were upon the war-path, they set off in pursuit of the foe—upon their first war trail.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BOY CONSPIRATORS.

YELLOW MEDICINE AGENCY was the scene of no little excitement, for there was to be a shooting-match there that day; and a big time was anticipated, for such amusement of the border settlers usually drew a large number of persons. And, what made this all the more interesting, it was to be a match for boys. A fine rifle of exquisite workmanship and elegant finish was to be the prize given to the champion marksman. There had been several matches for men during the past season, at which the boys were not allowed to compete; and so old Squire Podson concluded that he would make a match for the boys, and not admit the men. He concluded that if the threatened Indian war was an incentive to produce skillful marksmanship in men, it would hold good in boys, and so he sent off and purchased the prize rifle, then gave notice of the contest. The shooting was all to be done with the new rifle, at the distance of one hundred and fifty paces.

The boys at the Agency—and there were quite a number of them—were wild over the coming match, and were out practicing daily in the woods at target-shooting. There were some fine shots in the party, and the contest was likely to be a close one. There was but little difference in the shooting of Tom Grayson, Josh Parson and Ivan Le Clercq. If there was any difference, it was in favor of the latter. Le Clercq was a French half-breed, and all believed that he was older than he represented himself to be. He was a fine-looking lad, with dark eyes, pleasant face, and a form straight as an arrow. He was rather wild and wayward, and some thought a little treacherous and insincere in character.

There were those in Yellow Medicine that objected to their boys associating with Ivan; and there were others who exercised but little control over their boys, and did not presume to select their companions. The result was that those inclined to mischief became the followers of the wild, harum-scarum Ivan Le Clercq; while the quiet disposed were the friends of Tom Grayson.

The latter was a kind, brave and whole-souled lad of seventeen, who loved the sports of the woods as well as any one living. He was kind and generous to both old and young, and possessed of all the attributes of a true and perfect man, both moral and physical. But somehow or other, a spirit of rivalry had sprung up between Tom and his followers and Ivan and his associates. On the part of Tom, how-

ever, it was in the friendliest spirit; but with Ivan the characteristic jealousy of the half-breed cropped out on more than one occasion.

As a boy, from a certain period, has a natural tendency toward sin, Ivan, as a matter of course, had the largest party of followers; and as the two parties stood divided on all other questions, so they were divided on the coming shooting-match. Ivan and party practiced off by themselves, keeping the result a secret from the others; but in the mean time he sent a spy into Tom's camp, and thereby kept posted as to Tom and Josh's skill. The latter, however, were not ignorant of Ivan's movements, and his skill as a marksman, and lost no time in preparing themselves for the contest so far as practice was concerned.

This was really what Squire Podson wanted. He knew that practice made perfect, and if they were to have an Indian war, a boy, if a skillful shot, could make up in marksmanship what he lacked in physical power; and thus both boys and men could be brought into service.

Ivan Le Clercq finally became so anxious to be the winner of the prize that he let his ambition stoop to the unscrupulous trick of stealing Tom's gun and hiding it away where it could not be found for several days. At least, all suspected him of doing it, upon very strong circumstantial evidence. This roused the blood in Tom's veins, and he resolved to have Ivan defeated in the shooting-match, even at the sacrifice of the honor of winning the prize himself; and so sent an invitation to Sure Shot Seth to attend the match.

Some way or other, Le Clercq got wind of this movement, when another trouble was added to his list of fancied wrongs; and to obviate this new danger to his winning the prize, he called a council of four of his most intimate friends on the evening before the day of the contest. They met about sunset on the river-bank, and in tones of secrecy discussed the probable result of the morrow's sport.

All felt satisfied that if Sure Shot Seth came, he would win the day without any trouble.

"But we must not let him come," said Le Clercq, emphatically; "we don't want the word to go away that us Yaller Medicine boys war beat shootin' by a woolly-headed trapper boy."

"But if he concludes to come, how are we going to help ourselves?" asked one of his companions.

"That's the question before the house," said Ivan, "and I'd like it if you fellows could help me figger it out."

"There's no way that I can see, unless we can induce the squire to admit no one to the contest what don't b'long in the Agency," Rube Johnson suggested.

"He couldn't do that now, for the old fool's givin' notice to all the States and territories, and the citizens of the moon, that we're to have a shoot, and so the thing 'll have to go off as advertised. I wouldn't keer if it wa'n't for that Seth. I think I could just scoop all Yaller Medicine sick and clean. But I've a way in my mind as how to keep Seth away."

"How?" asked a companion.

"Guess."

"Shoot him?"

"Not that rough."

"Stick him into the river with a stone round his neck?"

"No; watch the road he'll come to-morrow, and catch him and tie him up till after the shooting is over," said Ivan.

"That'll fix him," exclaimed a companion, approvingly.

"Let's do it," echoed the others.

"Nuff said," added Ivan; "if you fellows 'll say you'll help me, I'll get ropes ready to-night and to-morrow we'll come down here and watch him where he crosses the river, and snail him up. What do you say?"

"All right! we'll help!" cried the young scamps. And the matter being thus settled, the conspirators adjourned, and retraced their footsteps toward home. But scarcely were they out of sight ere two maidens, of about sixteen summers, stepped from a thicket near, their pretty young faces aglow with pleasure, and their bright eyes sparkling with inward delight.

"We'll see about that tying up Sure Shot Seth, won't we, Maggie?" said one.

"We will that, Emma; and won't it be jolly to beat such bad boys?"

And the two maidens laughed merrily over the idea, as hand-in-hand they sauntered leisurely homeward.

CHAPTER IX.

WHO WON THE RIFLE?

THE day of the shooting-match dawned bright and clear. The air was soft and light, and not a breeze was stirring. Nature seemed to have prepared the day especially for Squire Podson's entertainment; and by noon all the people in the Agency and vicinity had gathered in the "Openings" in the river bottom to witness the contest. Not all either, for Ivan Le Clercq and four of his boon companions were not there. Neither was Sure Shot Seth, but he was momentarily expected.

At one o'clock the shooting commenced, with indifferent result. Tom Grayson was not a little surprised at the absence of Ivan Le Clercq, and bitterly disappointed not to find one other face among the spectators. That was the face of Emma Milbank. All the rest of the women and girls of his acquaintance were there except she and Maggie Harris.

Now, Tom loved Emma very dearly; hence his disappointment at not seeing her there. For her to see him win the prize would have been worth mere

to him than a dozen prizes; for her to have cheered his success with one smile, would have been worth still more than all; for it would have assured him of her regards—that his love was in a measure reciprocated. He was not positive that Emma loved him; but she had always received his advances in such a way as to give him encouragement.

Meanwhile, we will look after Ivan Le Clercq and his party. Early that morning the young rascals put out for the river, and, having reached its banks, scattered out along the stream about a hundred yards apart to watch for the coming of Sure Shot Seth. After hours of impatient waiting and watching, a boat rounded the bend up the river with a single occupant—Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman.

The boy that made this discovery hastily communicated the fact to those below, and in a few minutes all were together. They knew about where Seth would land, and as he would have to pass through a strip of dense woods after leaving the river to reach the Agency, Ivan and his party ran on ahead, and, having masked their faces, awaited the approach of Seth.

The unsuspecting youth soon came tripping lightly along, whistling as merrily as only a boy can. He was dressed in a neat-fitting suit of buckskin, with a fringe of the same material up the seams of the leggings, and around the waist and shoulders. He carried no rifle, nor weapon of any sort that was visible, which fact removed some fears from the breasts of those lying in ambush for him.

A smile rested upon the face of the boy, which was evidently the offspring of some pleasant thoughts; and to this was added the spring of an elastic step and a buoyant spirit.

Suddenly the rush of feet arrested his attention. He stopped and looked around him. Five persons, with masks upon their faces, rushed out of the shadows and seized him. He struggled desperately, heroically, and for awhile held his adversaries a lively fight. But superior numbers finally triumphed. He was overpowered, borne to the ground, and bound and gagged. Then he was carried into a thicket and tied to a tree where no human eye could detect his presence ten feet away.

This done, the young ruffians hurried away in the direction of the "Openings," whence they could already hear the clear ringing report of the rifles at the shooting tournament coming.

When a few rods from the thicket they threw aside their disguises; Ivan Le Clercq's face looked red and excited; it showed the unmistakable signs of a guilty conscience. But calming his emotions the best way he could, he entered the crowd gathered in the Openings.

"Ho, Ivan, my boy," exclaimed Squire Podson, "you are late, young man; what the deuce 've you been?"

"We've been out on a deer-hunt. Buck Jones said that were three deer that come down to the old ferry every morning to drink, and we thought we'd secure one or two."

And what a falsehood the boy told!

"Well," continued the squire, "you were just in time, for the last boy has shot, and Tom Grayson is champion so far. We have been looking for Sure Shot Seth, down from the Hermit Hut, all morning, and he may come yet. But now, Ivan, do you want to try your hand?"

"To be sure I do; that's what I come for," was the impudent reply.

The squire loaded his gun and handed it to Ivan. The youth turned facing the target, raised the gun—shooting off-hand—and fired. In a minute the news came up from the target that he made a winning shot.

The crowd cheered the boy lustily.

Each contestant was allowed three shots, the best in three winning.

Tom Grayson had hit the target twice out of three possible shots.

Again the gun was loaded, and again Ivan Le Clercq fired. In a moment the news came up that he had made another winning shot.

Loud and prolonged rung the shouts from the spectators; while with a look of triumph, Ivan's eyes sought those of Tom.

Again was the gun loaded and handed to the youth. With more than usual ceremony, intended to command admiration, Ivan raised the rifle, and glancing along the barrel, fired. Then with a bow to the spectators, he turned and handed the rifle to Podson.

A deep and deadly silence fell upon the crowd, and an eager and expectant look mounted every face, in the anxiety to know the result of Ivan's last shot.

Slowly upon the air came the response:

"Missed entirely."

Then the lull broke into a storm of shouts of derision and exclamations of regret. A general hubbub of voices arose, and the crowd became clamorous to know who had won the prize.

"Nobody in course," answered Squire Podson; "Tom and Ivan tied, and so the two 'll have to shoot it over."

This satisfied the friends of the two boys, and the shooting was resumed; but it resulted as before—in a tie.

"Shoot it over ag'in," said the squire; but at this juncture a new-comer pushed his way into the crowd and demanded a trial in the contest.

No one had noticed this young stranger until he was in the midst of the party; and all were, not a little surprised, as well as enlisted with curiosity, at his presence.

He was rather an odd specimen of the genus boy. There was no telling how old he was; but that he

was not beyond the limitations of the rules of the contest, was evident to all. His face was covered with a complication of rings and dirty streaks made of the different pigments used by the Indians. Around each eye was painted three rings—the inner one being black, the second blue, and the third red—which gave him the wild, staring expression of a comic old owl. His nose was painted black; his cheeks were touched with blue; and his mouth encircled by a ring of dirty red. His hair was cropped close and the bristling stubs had also received a coloring of red, black and blue, in spots. He was dressed in a suit as odd and queer as himself; and, altogether, he was the most comic and clownish-looking person it had been the fortune of our friends to meet.

"Mortal inspiration!" exclaimed the old squire, at sight of the lad, "who in all the mystery be you?"

"I are the young ring-eyed eagle, jist soared down from the Rocky Mountains to try a shot at this business," exclaimed the youth, in a kind of a squeaky tone, keeping one corner of his mouth depressed; "I are the little eagle whose dad lords it over the United States and screams along the sky. Show me the chicken that says he can beat me shootin', and I'll flop a wing into his anatomy."

"Hold on here, youngster," said Podson, "you're crazy, ben't you?"

"Crazy! Oh-a-yil a-yil!" he screamed, in exact imitation of the eagle, "give me a few shots at the target, and I'll show you that the ring-eyed eagle of Sky-Puncher-Peak can warm the wax in any boy's ears this side of his fust birthday at shootin'. Fight, did you say? Lord, no; I'd run afore I'd fight, for I'm the young bird of Freedom—a-yil a-yil!"

The inquisitive throng, that had crowded around the lad, filled with great excitement and curiosity, now burst into a peal of laughter at the comic antics of the rollicking young Eagle from Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"Well, now, lookey here, Eagle," said Podson, "what you from, and what do you want here?"

"From Sky-Puncher-Peak, I tell ye, and am here to take a hand in the shootin'-match. Jist furnish me a gun, show me the thingamagig you shoot at, and I'll show you that the ring-eyed Eagle from Sky-Puncher-Peak's not so alouchy, if he is jist gittin' his fust pin-feathers."

Podson, as well as a number of others, saw that the lad, whoever he was, was playing a role in his disguise; and while they were wondering who he could be, and what his object was, their amusement became manifest in peals of hearty laughter. Finally the old squire said:

"Well, if you've come here to shoot, why, in course, you must have a chance. This 'ere rifle's the prize, but, mind, it'll take three shots in the center of yon target to take it."

"How many chances'll you give me—forty?"

"Just three."

"Oh, vampires and harpies!" exclaimed the youth, with a grimace that provoked a roar of laughter. "Then 'cordin' to that some chap has scored two out of three; jist show him to me, please, till I see the white of his eye, and then I—"

"I'm the chap, sir," said Ivan Le Clercq, stepping out and confronting the Eagle from Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"That's nothin'," said the youth, running his eye along Ivan's form with a quick, but critical look.

"That's a tie," interrupted the squire, "between him—Ivan—and that feller; so if you want to try a shot at the mark, why, do so."

"Thank you; please pass me yer fusilade and I'll try it meffle. Cl'ar the track, folks, for the young Eagle from Sky-Puncher-Peak."

The crowd parted in a lane extending down toward the target, and scarcely was the range cleared ere the boy carelessly threw the rifle to his shoulder, and the gun was discharged, as all supposed, by accident.

"Oh!" burst involuntarily from the boy's lips, and then an exclamation burst from the lips of those who saw his movements, and were ready to censure him for his carelessness.

"He's not fit to handle a gun," observed one in an undertone, to a companion.

"Don't fool yourself. He's no fool; he's playin' off," said another; "but listen to the report."

"A plumb-center shot," was the announcement that came up from the target.

A wild, prolonged shout that fairly split the heavens burst from the lips of the crowd.

The boy whistled softly as if with surprise at his own skill. The shouts of the crowd turned to laughter as they saw the sober, comic expression of the inimitable young clown's face.

"Ready for another," said Podson, as he placed a cap on the nipple of the gun.

The boy spat upon his hands, winked at an imaginary friend, then took the rifle, and before it was scarcely leveled, fired.

A deep silence followed the report, and every eye turned toward the target.

"Another winning shot," was the announcement that the recorder sent forth, and again the crowd cheered the young "ring-eyed eagle."

The third time was the gun reloaded, and the third time did the lad awkwardly swing the weapon to his shoulder, squint first with one eye then the other along the barrel, to the amusement of the spectators; then he finally closed both eyes and fired.

For the next half a minute not a soul seemed to breathe, so deep and intense was the anxiety and expectancy of the party. But it was the calm that preceded the storm following the announcement:

"That shot takes the prize—the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher Peak has won!"

CHAPTER X.

HUNTED AND HAUNTED.

THE shouts that followed the announcement of the result of the shooting-match were deafening; and the young Ring-Eyed-Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak became the recipient of a hundred congratulations. Tom Grayson was the first to grasp the young stranger's hand, for since he had failed to win the prize, it afforded him supreme pleasure to know that Ivan Le Clercq had been defeated.

The latter stood off at one side among his little party of friends scowling with chagrin, and burning with anger at his defeat.

"By heavens!" he exclaimed, in a whisper to his four companions, "if I can get old Podson to extend the time, I'll run up and release Sure Shot Seth, and let him come down and beat that young braggart. Tom Grayson is tickled half to death 'cause I got beat, and I'd give an eye jist to see him look down his nose, and that daubed-faced fool beaten."

"Here, youngster," the voice of Squire Podson suddenly broke in, as he handed The Eagle the rifle and accoutrements belonging to it; "here's the prize—take it, for you have won it fair and honorably, whoever you may be. The gun is loaded, and that's not less'n fifty bullets in the pouch, and powder in the horn to shove 'em. Take it, and I hope you will make every shot count so long as you may possess it."

A faint scream of terror came from the direction of the woods some two hundred yards away, before The Eagle could respond, as he was about to do.

Every eye was at once turned in that direction, and to the horror of all, a maiden, whom all recognized as Emma Milbank, emerged from the woods at the top of her speed, closely pursued by an Indian warrior.

"Oh, my God!" burst from Squire Podson's lips, "the savages are at their hellish work already."

Brave hearts trembled, and white lips quivered. Women fell faint, and children crouched with terror at the feet of their parents. It was a terrible moment in the history of those people's lives, for all seemed paralyzed with the terrors of death. But all were started from their lethargy by another shriek.

"The savage has caught Emma!" was the terrible announcement that now pealed from a dozen lips.

True enough, the savage had overtaken her within ten rods of the edge of the timber, and lifting her in his arms was fleeing back to the woods with her.

"Stand aside for the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak," shouted that mysterious lad, and swinging his newly-won prize to his shoulder glanced along the barrel and fired.

A yell of agony came down from the woods; and when all saw the savage stagger and fall, a shout burst from their lips; the Eagle had made another wonderful shot, and had saved the maiden from captivity.

With the speed of a deer the young marksman dashed out of the crowd and sped away toward the fallen foe. He met the maiden he had saved on the way, and exchanging a few words with her, ran on, passed the fallen savage and plunged into the woods. A moment later a rifle-shot rung through the forest and echoed in quivering intonations along the valley of the Minnesota. Scarcely had the sound died on the air, when forth from the woods south of the Openings a hundred half-nude forms rushed, yelling like demons.

With a cry of horror the surprised settlers turned and fled toward their homes. With the women and children in front, the men covered their retreat, fighting the foe as they fell back. The savages' onward rush was checked several times; but nothing daunted, they rallied and renewed the contest fierce and deadly.

It soon became evident that the settlers could not repulse the foe, and so the retreat was turned in the direction of the stockade or fort, north of the agency. The savages seeing their intentions, attempted to thwart their plans by a general onslaught; but nobly and heroically did the valiant settlers fight for their wives and little ones. Many however, fell before the fort was reached and the gate closed between them and danger; and on the pages of history this struggle is known as the Massacre of Yellow Medicine Agency. On the same day, the minions of Little Crow, Inkpaduta and Little Priest, scattering out over the country, began a general massacre. Action, in Meeker county, really became the scene of the first bloodshed, if we except that at the Hermit Hut, the home of the Boy Brigade. Fort Ridgely was closely besieged, and the country to the south overrun. The call to arms rung through the north, and everywhere the hardy young manhood of the land left the plow within the furrow and the harvest ungleaned and rushed to battle.

The woods of Minnesota rung wild with the war-whoop of the savages and the shouts of their enemies. But few troops were in the State. Forts Riley, Ridgely and Abercrombie could not muster over two hundred men, and so the savages had but little to contend with in their onward rush to the destruction of the whites. But history has recorded all the main facts of this terrible Indian outbreak. We have only to deal with one of the chains of incidents consequent upon the war, and which has escaped the notice of the historian.

When Emma joined her friends at the Openings, after the Eagle had rescued her by shooting down her captor, her first words were:

"Oh, they have got Maggie! the Indians have captured her!"

Before any one could respond, the savages burst from the woods, and all sought shelter in flight. Not until all those that had escaped were inside of

the fort was the subject of Maggie's capture brought up. Then the father of the missing girl sought out Emma, and from her learned the particulars of his daughter's capture. But she carefully omitted telling the object that had taken her and Maggie alone into the woods.

Mr. Harris's agony and suspense became intense. The savages surrounded the fort, and there was no escape until darkness should set in. The sun was still two hours high, and during the time spent in waiting for the shadows of night, the distracted father made preparations for going in search of his child. A number of friends volunteered to go with him; and among them were Ivan Le Clercq and his four boon companions.

There was one person among the band of besieged that noticed a wild look of uneasiness upon the face of Ivan and his party; and had it not been for the general excitement that prevailed among the crowd, others might have noticed that their looks were the outgrowth of a guilty conscience. Even their movements and very actions denoted guilt; and finally they went to one side and entered into a secret conversation—very suspicious under the circumstances.

"Boys," said Ivan, glancing furtively around him, "I'm afraid an awful crime rests upon our heads."

"You mean 'bout that Sure Shot Seth affair, don't you?" asked Rube Johnson.

"Yes; the Indians, I expect, found him and killed him," said Le Clercq.

"I've thought of that, too," added Gus Stewart.

"Mebby, though," said Abe Thorne, "Maggie and Emma let him loose before the Indians come; you know Emma run out of the woods near where we left him."

"S'pose we ask Emma," said Rube Johnson, "Heavens, no!" replied Ivan, "for if he didn't get away, that'll let the whole secret out; and if he should be found dead, we might get our necks stretched."

"We might ask her if she seen him," said Gus Stewart.

"No," persisted Ivan; "we don't want to say a word about him, for all know that we were away when the shootin' match begun; and if we should go to askin' any questions, it might raise suspicion at once. Just keep still, and when I get out of this fort, I'll slip out into the woods and see if he is there or not."

Thus the matter was settled for the time being, and finally, when darkness set in, the father of the captive girl, followed by Ivan and party, and also, Tom Grayson and Harry Busted, stole out of the fort, and away into the woods without discovery by the red-skins.

When near the point where they tied Sure Shot Seth to the tree, Ivan whispered to one of his companions:

"I'm goin' to drop out of the crowd now and slip over to the tree; and if I don't overtake you in ten minutes, why, you will know that I can't find you, and so give the hoot of an owl; and if I hear, I'll answer."

"All right, Ivan," answered his friend.

Ivan dropped behind the party, and finally he turned to the left and went off in another direction. It was so extremely dark in the deep, dense woods that the absence of the youth was unnoticed, and, with the silence of shadows, the party pushed cautiously on.

Le Clercq crept softly along through the darkness of night with the stealth of an assassin. His heart lay like a leaden weight in his breast, and his breath came in gasps. The fear of discovering himself a murderer worked like a horror upon his mind; and there was nothing in the blackness of the night, nor the solitude of his surroundings to inspire him with aught else than the gloomiest forebodings.

Ivan Le Clercq had no intention of injuring Sure Shot Seth. It was his intention to wander off through the woods, after the shooting-match had ended, with the new rifle that he felt certain he would win; but at the same time he intended to happen to stumble across the luckless Seth and liberate him. Unfortunately, the Indians interfered with these arrangements; and Ivan knew not but he had added the crime of murder to his dishonorable trick. But cruel, envious, treacherous as he was, the half-breed possessed a heart capable of the feelings of remorse and fear; and, ever and anon, as he crept on through the woods and gloom, he glanced wildly back over his shoulders as if fleeing from the wrath of an inscrutable God.

He was well acquainted with every foot of the ground he was traversing, and, notwithstanding the darkness, he moved directly toward the thicket where he had left Sure Shot Seth. When within a few yards of the tree to which they tied the young trapper, he paused and listened. But all was silent as the presence of death. A chill passed over his form, and the lump in his throat seemed to grow larger and more depressing. A thousand ogreish forms seemed to unfold themselves from the darkness, and flit in endless procession around him. His brain throbbed; his knees grew weak, and his hand trembled. The thought of flight from the horrible spot entered his mind, but he seemed possessed of no power to execute the desire of his will. He seemed spellbound and unable to move in any direction, save that of the tree to which his victim had been bound. Some horrible fascination drew him thither; and ere he was aware of the fact, he stood by the tree, motionless and breathless. He could see nothing. The darkness of night, and the cloud of sin hovering over his soul, blinded him. He swallowed back the great lump in his throat, stretched out his hand, and touched the tree.

He started back, as though he had touched the

shining form of a serpent, and an icy chill was communicated by the touch to his whole body. For a moment he stood peering into the gloom, as immovably fixed as a stone statue. But, gradually recovering; he again put out his hand, and, touching the tree, ran his fingers downward along the trunk, feeling for the rope that girded it and the body of Sure Shot Seth, were the youth still there. Slowly he moved his fingers down, and when it came in contact with what he knew to be the rope, he started, with a low, gasping breath, as though his very soul had been suddenly convulsed.

The rope was still there, and he had no doubt now that Seth, living or dead, was on the opposite side of the tree, for the strands were drawn taut.

"Seth!" he called, in a low tone, but started back, crouching as with abject terror, for the sound of his own voice seemed re-echoed by the sepulchral voice of a dozen demons. Terror had wrought his brain to a frenzy. But now, wholly under the influence of fear, he moved around the tree, with his hand outstretched before him; and he had gone but a step or two when his fingers came in contact with something cold, unnatural to the touch. It was a human face, cold and clammy in death.

"Great God! he's dead!" involuntarily burst from the wretched boy's lips, and he turned to flee. But that terrible, invisible power seized upon him again, and held him by the side of his victim.

Ivan Le Clercq was suffering all the tortures of a guilty conscience. His heart grew sick and his head dizzy. Finally, the thought of detection and a more terrible punishment rose in his mind, and measures toward concealing the crime were suggested. He never stopped to think that his four companions were equally guilty as himself, but reaching forward he cut the rope that bound the body to the tree. The stiffened corpse fell heavily to the ground. Ivan took up the rope and tossed it away out into the brush; then he dragged the body into the undergrowth; and, with the reflection that the wolves would soon make identity impossible, he turned and fled from the scene of his crime, with the blood of a fellow-being resting upon his soul.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LED TRAIL.

MR. HARRIS, accompanied by his young companions, pursued his way through the deep woods and lonely halls of the night. He knew not where they would find the captive maiden, but by scouting in all directions through the woods, hoped to gain some clew to her whereabouts.

Ivan Le Clercq's four companions hung on the rear of the party, eagerly listening for Ivan's call; but as the minutes wore away into an hour, and nothing of his approach being heard, the boys began to feel great uneasiness about him, and a thousand conjectures as to his prolonged absence, passed rapidly through their minds. Something of the same fear as that experienced by Ivan himself, began to smite the conscience of the four boys; and in tones of bitter anguish they expressed their regrets of having aided in the affair with Sure Shot Seth.

The perils that had so suddenly fallen upon these boys, the destruction of their homes, and the loss of friends, all conspired to render them victims of the deepest remorse and most painful fear. It was a punishment they were receiving for their bad conduct, their wicked ways, and cruelty to others who did not please them, or who refused to become followers of that young vagabond, Ivan Le Clercq.

Hitherto, these boys had been brave and fearless in the woods at night; but now, with the fear of retribution for the crime of murder hanging over them, they became timid and cowardly; and shrunk close to each other; and started, even at the snap of a twig, or the rustle of a bush, proving, beyond a doubt, that courage and strength come only of a clear conscience—that cowardice is the offspring of evil.

For hours the party journeyed on through the woods, but as Ivan failed to join them, Rube Johnson plucked his three companions aside, and said:

"Boys, Ivan has either been lost or else got into trouble; and I don't think we'd ort to desert him. We're all to blame, if Sure Shot Seth is dead; and I expect he is."

"Oh, I wish we hadn't tied him up to the tree," said Abe Thorne, regretfully.

"But then we didn't mean to have him killed," answered Gus Stewart.

"I know it; but then the law won't excuse ignorance, and if it's ever found out, we'll be apt to hang like Zeke Snyder did," said Rube.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed his frightened, horrified companions.

Here the conversation dropped, for Mr. Harris and the rest of the party had stopped to wait till they came up.

"Giving out, boys?" asked Harris.

"Oh, no," answered Rube; "we can follow long as you can lead, Mr. Harris."

"Well, I'm beginning to think that it's useless tramping 'round here through the night, and propose we camp here until daybreak," answered the settler.

To this all assented, and then all but one lay down upon the earth to rest. Few eyes closed in sleep, however; the terrors and excitement of the day were too fresh in every mind to admit of the composing influence of slumber.

By daybreak every man and boy was ready to march; and without a bit of breakfast they took their lonely way through the woods, trusting to Providence for something to eat.

Fortunately, they struck an Indian trail soon after sunrise, and although there was nothing in the trail

to convince them that Maggie was in the party, all concluded that, as the enemy were moving away from the Agency, they had her in custody.

There had not been over five warriors in the party. They had taken no precaution to hide their trail, nor the number of feet that made it. It ran rather zigzag in its course, owing to the open condition of the woods, and always following the best route. From these facts, Mr. Harris and Tom Grayson, added to other circumstantial evidence corroborative of their belief, concluded that Maggie had been taken that way.

They pushed on, and soon struck the smoldering embers of a deserted camp-fire; and, that it had been left quite recently, was also evident from various facts. Not far away lay the carcass of a deer that had been slain that morning. One quarter had been removed, and had, no doubt, fed the hunger of those who had been encamped there. Our friends pounced upon the carcass like hawks, and soon each one had a rich, juicy slice broiling on a heap of red coals.

Mr. Harris made a careful search of the ground for some evidence that his child had been there. He had no difficulty in making it out an Indian camp, but if Maggie had been a prisoner there, her captors had taken great pains to conceal every trace that would apprise friends, disposed to follow in search of her, of the fact.

The keen eye of Tom Grayson finally discovered something that raised a question among the party. He found where a number of green boughs had been cut from the parent branch of an oak; but as these boughs were not seen about, their absence provoked some curiosity. After some search however, they were found stuck in the ground, here and there among other shrubbery where none but the keenest eye could have told but that they had grown. And even after they had been found, but few could have formed the least idea of what they had been used for; but Tom Grayson was an experienced woodsman, and at once explained what he believed were the facts in the case—that the bushes had been used for a bower; and if so, the bower had never been erected for any of their number, nor for a male prisoner, but for one whom they wished to protect from the dews of heaven and the chilly air of night. And who else could this have been but the frail, tender maiden, Maggie Harris, whose beauty was far more calculated to inspire devotion and admiration in the savages' breasts than any feeling of ill or barbarous treatment.

Mr. Harris grasped at this clew, slight as it was, to his child's whereabouts; and became anxious to resume the search at once. Tom, however, more prudent and thoughtful despite his years, advised caution and moderation; and after a sumptuous repast had been made off the deer, and portions of it roasted and stowed away in pockets for future need, the party took the trail.

They followed on about two miles, when they struck the eastern shore of Lake Rock Island. Here it appeared that the enemy had taken to the water, and although the lake was small, it afforded an admirable place of shelter among its many rocky islands.

Mr. Harris suggested a division of the party to scout around the lake, but before this could be carried into effect, a "dugout," with five Indians, was seen creeping down toward the southern shore.

Our friends at once dropped back under cover of the woods, watching the red-skins narrowly. They soon reached the shore and landed, but had no captive with them; and so Tom Grayson, as well as his companions, were led to believe that Maggie had been secreted among the islands in the lake, and as soon as the red-skins had passed out of sight, the pursuers began moving around the lake to the north. As they advanced, the shore became rough, broken and rocky, and in many places shelving and precipitous. The path they were following finally pressed them to the water's edge; and once there, there was no deviation to the right nor left, unless they scaled the heights or took to the lake.

They had fled along the narrow way until the west shore was reached, when Tom Grayson stopped and exclaimed:

"Boys, what if the Indians should cage us in here?"

The little party started with an exclamation; the idea had never entered their minds before.

"We cannot observe too much precaution," said Mr. Harris.

"No; if the enemy should see us in here, it would be all day with us," said Tom. "We could neither retreat nor advance, and of course, we couldn't climb this embankment; so the lake would be our only avenue of escape. Who knows but that we've been led into this?"

"Oh, gracious! look here!" suddenly burst from Rube Johnson's lips, as he pointed out across the water.

"Oh, God!" cried Daniel Harris, at the sight that met his gaze, and clutching his brow, he staggered back and would have fallen but for the wall of rocks that supported him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY RESCUER.

A BREATHLESS silence fell upon the little party. Rube Johnson with outstretched arm pointed toward the nearest island in the little lake.

Every eye following in the direction indicated beheld a fearful sight.

The island was about fifty yards from the shore. It was a rocky bed with but little shrubbery. A narrow defile starting at the water's edge, terminated in a sort of low cavern, and in the passage, with her back toward them and her hands tied

at her back, they beheld the form of Maggie Harris; while crouched before her in the mouth of the cavern was a huge panther with dripping jaws, glowing eyeballs, and quivering tail. The animal was ready for the leap, and waited only for a movement of Maggie as the signal.

The maiden seemed transfixed with horror, for she never moved nor uttered a sound indicative of fear.

The head of the terrible beast could be seen only to the left of Maggie's cheek and just over her shoulder. To change the position either to the right or left, the walls of the den concealed the panther from view, while it was impossible to get above them on the bluff. The body of the beast could be seen distinctly enough, but it lay in such a position that a bullet shot at it would range backward without any fatal result, in which case the wounded creature would soon destroy the helpless girl. The only vital spot exposed was the right eye; but this could be reached from the shore only at the risk of Maggie's life; for this vital mark lay in a range with the maiden's cheek, and that range would not admit of an inch deviation.

To slay the beast without injuring Maggie would require the skill and nerve of an unerring shot. This skill was present, but not the nerve; for Mr. Harris, as well as the boys, had all been wildly excited by the terrible situation in which they found the maiden. Tom Grayson was the best shot in the party, but he refused to shoot. His hands trembled. He raised his rifle once, but lowered it again, saying:

"I dare not shoot, Mr. Harris. To wound the panther would be sure to result in a horrible death to Maggie; and to shoot it in the head, a bullet must fairly graze the maiden's cheek."

"Oh, my God!" cried the distracted father, "my child will be torn to pieces! The moment she moves it will spring upon her! For heaven's sake, boys, make no noise that will draw her attention away. So long as she gazes into the eyes of the beast, it may not attack her. Both are under a terrible fascination—that of each other's countenance. But, boys, won't some of you try a shot?"

"I'll try one," said the voice of a new-comer, and turning, all beheld that strange, wild youth who had won the prize at the shooting-match—the indomitable young Eagle-from-Sky-Puncher-Peak.

"Oh, my young friend!" cried Harris, "can you not slay that beast and save my child?"

"I can try it, sir," said the Eagle, and stepping forward he threw his new rifle to his shoulder and fired before any one had time for a second thought.

A scream rose upon the island—a scream from Maggie's lips, and was answered by a shout of joy from the father as he saw the panther stretched at full length along the earth, its limbs extended and quivering in the paroxysms of death.

Maggie turned toward her friends and uttered a wild cry of joy, then staggering, she fell—overcome by a sudden reaction from terror to joy.

"My poor child!" cried the father, "she has fainted, and will yet be dead ere I can get to her."

It was plain to all that Maggie's hands had been bound, and she left alone upon the island. What had induced the savages to do so, was incomprehensible to our friends. Tom Grayson expressed a belief that there were savages concealed on the island ready to entrap any one who might venture thereon; and as Maggie lay unconscious on the island, there was no way by which they could satisfy themselves of this fact before venturing over there.

"What do you think, my young friend?" said Mr. Harris, turning to the Eagle, who stood silently at one side reloading his rifle; "do you think there are savages concealed on that island?"

"I can't say, general, for sure; it seems queer that armed scavengers would leave her there alone unless they thought she would not get away, and that no one would dare follow them here. But that's a question that must not keep assistance from her, and I'm going to board that log and paddle over there."

Slings his rifle well up on his shoulders, he waded into the water, threw himself astride of a log that had floated there, and with a large piece of bark, paddled out into the lake toward the island.

The fearless lad was submerged almost to the waist in the water, but his rifle and accoutrements were kept dry. He moved slowly and with some difficulty—the log being inclined to roll in the water.

With eager impatience those on the shore watched the progress of the boy as he labored on through the waves. Mr. Harris paced the shore with restless anxiety, muttering a prayer for the safe landing of the young borderman, and the rescue of his child who still lay motionless on the island.

The Eagle had nearly reached the island when a yell arose to the south, and glancing in that direction all saw, to their utmost horror, a dozen savages coming along the shore toward them.

Before one of our friends had time for a word or act, the voice of the Eagle cried out:

"Flee, friends, and trust Maggie's safety to God and me."

There was really no alternative but to obey, and Mr. Harris and his young friends at once beat a hasty retreat in the direction they had come, pursued by the yelling savages.

The Eagle reached the island before the savages were within gunshot, and assisting Maggie to her feet, conducted her to a point of safety on the opposite side of the island.

"You see, Maggie," the youth said, "I am now having a chance to repay your kindness."

"Oh, my friend!" she cried, "I am almost crazy. The Lord only knows what I have suffered since a captive. But, tell me, did the savages destroy the settlement?"

"Not altogether, Miss Maggie," the lad answered; "though, several were killed before the fort was reached. Your friends are all alive, I am happy to say."

"I know my dear father is," she answered, "for I saw him on the shore; but, are we not in great peril, here?"

"We're in danger, it is true; but we must not despair. If we can hold the red-skins at bay, we will get off after night sets in."

"How?" Maggie asked, perplexedly.

"Some one will bring a boat to us, surely; if not, I can construct a raft out of this driftwood. But, remain here under cover, Maggie, and I will watch the movements of those savages," the gallant youth answered.

He crept around the island and when he had discovered that the enemy was gone in pursuit of Harris and his party, the youth went down to the water's edge and washed the paint and dirt from his face and hands and then arranged his clothing in such a different, yet really natural way, that the boy was completely transformed from the odd, grotesque-looking Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak, to a different being; and that being was—*Sure Shot Seth, the Boy Rifleman!*

Maggie Harris was not ignorant of his identity. She and Emma Milbank had rescued him from the tree where Ivan Le Clercq and his companions had bound him; and that Ivan and his party might suffer the remorse that they now really were, these two brave and fearless girls had assisted Seth in arranging his disguise and keeping the secret. Unfortunately, their kindness to Seth had resulted in Maggie's capture; but never for a moment did the kind-hearted maiden regret what she had done.

Returning to Maggie, *Sure Shot Seth*, as we will now call the Eagle-of-Sky-Puncher-Peak, was greeted with a smile.

"You have discarded your disguise?"

"Yes; I think it has served me through," he answered. "I don't think one of my five young enemies, or friends either for that matter, penetrated it. I affected so much when in their presence that no one could think it was I."

"Then you won the prize at the contest?" she said, her pretty eyes sparkling with admiration and delight, as she gazed upon the manly form and handsome face of the boy hero.

"Yes; without any trouble, Maggie, thanks to you and Miss Milbank. This is the gun, and with it I slew Emma's captor, then ran into the woods in hopes of saving you, but was too late."

"I wonder what Ivan thinks of his treatment of you by this time?" she asked.

"I presume he thinks the Indians found me and slew me; and I desire that he knows no different until he has suffered in conscience, if he has any conscience at all, sufficient to make a better boy of him."

"He is a bad boy and I am afraid nothing will reform him," said Maggie. "Then you haven't seen any thing of them since yesterday?"

"Not of Ivan; the other four were with your father a few minutes ago; but I know they failed to recognize me."

"Oh, dear! dear!" cried the maiden, as her mind reverted to the horrors through which she had so recently passed; "I hope I will not have to pass through another such night of peril; but then if an Indian war has begun, we may all be slain."

"Do not borrow trouble, Maggie," said Seth, his eyes beaming with a light of admiration; "as soon as the news reaches the government authorities, troops will be sent to quell the savages."

"But it may be too late to save us, then."

"We must trust to fate, and not give up until resistance and perseverance are no longer of avail."

Scarcely had he spoken the last word when a bullet whistled past his ears and flattened against the rock behind him. Glancing along the east shore he saw a cloud of smoke hanging upon the edge of the woods, nearly two hundred yards away. The distance, and the close proximity of the shot to his head, caused him to marvel; for he knew that, as a general thing, there were no such shots among the savages.

For fear that another shot might be more successful, he withdrew with Maggie to the interior of the island, and they concealed themselves in a sort of a cave or a pocket in the rocky slit. Here they would have to wait until darkness came to their relief; and the moments that the young people passed there in each other's society were moments of supreme joy, to which the surrounding danger and their situation gave an air of wild romance.

Sure Shot Seth became deeply interested in Maggie, and that interest gradually deepened beyond mere friendship. From the moment he had met the maiden in the forest where Ivan and his friends had bound him, her bright, blue eyes and radiant, girlish face threw the enchantment of love around his boyish heart. It was his first love, and, scarcely conscious of the power that had come over the spirit of his usually free and light heart, he had been led on to risk danger and hardships in search of her—to gratify that strange longing which, he finally admitted to himself, was the longing of love.

On the other hand, Maggie had conceived an admiration for Seth that was fast developing into reciprocal love; and Seth was not slow in noticing her confidence and trust in him. But, both were young and unsophisticated in the workings and changes to which the human heart is susceptible; and so permitted no doubt, no fear, to cross the untroubled tranquillity and pleasure of love's young dream.

As the moments wore away into minutes, and the minutes into hours, the attention of the young people was suddenly drawn to the form of an Indian

standing on the southern shore of the lakelet. He was over three hundred yards away, else Seth would have been tempted to try his new rifle upon him.

From appearances, he was a young war-chief decorated in all the paraphernalia of barbaric finery. His scarlet blanket flashed brightly in the sun, and contrasted handsomely with the spotted jaguar skin that girded his loins. His movements were somewhat awkward and stiff, as though unaccustomed to the dignity required of one of his position.

"There seems to be more of the white man than the red-skin about that fellow yonder," said Seth, "and if I mistake not, he is a white man."

"I am sure the announcement gives me no more hope than ever," answered Maggie, "for I would rather be the prisoner of a red Indian than a white one."

"Yes, ten times, Maggie," answered Seth; "but I don't propose that you shall be either, if I can help it."

They watched the chief until he had left the beach, then entered into a discussion of the events of the day. And thus the day wore away without any further demonstration on the part of the enemy; but about sunset a sharp and vigorous firing was heard in the woods east of the lake, and that a battle was going on, Seth had not a single doubt.

Night finally closed in and put an end to the firing; and now *Sure Shot Seth* became restless and uneasy. He knew the enemy would avail themselves of the cover of darkness to regain the island and their fair captive, and, as they were likely to come in force, it would be impossible for him to repel them. He had been unable to do anything toward the construction of a raft during the day, and now the darkness made it almost impossible. His only hopes lay in Maggie's friends coming to their relief before the Indians got there.

The moon would not be up before ten o'clock, and the gloom was rendered more intense by the gray mist that hung over the lake.

Seth silently paced the shore in eager anticipation of the approach of friends, ever and anon halting to listen for some sound. But a deep silence reigned. Not a breath of air was stirring—not a ripple chafed the island.

With her shawl drawn hood-like over her head, Maggie, tired and hungry, sat under a ledge within the sound of her young protector's footsteps.

Suddenly the discharge of firearms burst upon the night, heavy, sullen, and stunning; and was followed by yells and groans that fairly chilled the blood in the veins of Seth and Maggie.

The latter sprang from her seat, and, running to *Sure Shot's* side, grasped him by the arm and exclaimed:

"What did that mean, Seth?"

"I am afraid that the friends we have been waiting for, and the Indians we have expected, have run together on the water," answered Seth; "from the sound, however, I think our friends were the ones that fired."

Silence succeeded the murderous discharge of weapons. Not a sound could be heard, and what the result of the collision had been, Seth could not tell. But in the course of a few minutes the sound of waves breaking upon the island became distinctly audible. As there was no air stirring, our friends knew a boat must be approaching.

In a breathless silence they waited and listened. Soon the faint dip of a paddle was heard. Seth strained his eyes into the gloom, and was soon enabled to make out the dimmest outlines of a long boat creeping toward them across the lake.

The silence observed was sufficient evidence of itself, that the craft contained enemies; and making this fact known to Maggie in a whisper, the two stepped back under the shadow of a shelving rock, and waited the approach of the craft, Seth with his revolver in hand.

The danger that threatened the young folks seemed to strengthen their eyesight, or else, at this juncture, it became somewhat lighter, for they were now enabled to make out the dark length of a long "dugout," with three persons seated in it, quite distinctly.

The prow of the craft soon touched the island when the occupants landed, and having drawn the boat partly upon the beach, turned and moved cautiously away across the island. They passed within a few paces of Seth and Maggie; and no sooner were they out of sight than Seth whispered:

"Now's our time, Maggie. Let up jump into their boat and flee."

Maggie made no dissent, but taking hold of Seth's arm, permitted herself to be led to the boat. Stepping into the craft Seth assisted the maiden in and to a seat. But the instant she sat down she uttered a little cry of terror, for her seat moved under her—a savage, who lay curled up in the craft evidently for that very purpose, sprang to his feet and uttered a yell. But it was his last. Scarcely had the sound died upon his lips ere Seth's revolver flashed in his face, and he fell overboard into the lake, his limbs beating the water in his last agonies.

But *Sure Shot Seth* now found himself in a dilemma from which there was no escape. Before he could get the dugout off, or seek shelter among the rocks, the three savages were upon him. He turned and met them, revolver in hand. One of them shot past him, and, leaping into the boat, seized Maggie. Seth was standing up in the prow at the time, and the impetus with which the savage landed in the dugout shot it out into the lake—so abruptly that *Sure Shot* was pitched forward, head foremost, upon the beach.

As the youth fell, he fired his revolver and killed one of the remaining warriors; but before he could regain his feet the other had grappled, and together they fought in deadly embrace upon the beach.

CHAPTER XIII.
THE DISGUISED CAPTOR.

MAGGIE was thrown almost prostrate by the sudden lurch of the boat, and before she could recover herself, she found that she was in the power of a savage, who, in plain English, said, "Not a word, or I'll smother you."

Filled with terror, she sunk half-unconscious in the wet bottom of the boat, while her captor took up the paddle and kept the craft moving out further and further from the island. The maiden knew not what had been the fate of her brave young companion. She could hear the sounds of a struggle somewhere, and suppose they proceeded from the island. She breathed a prayer for Seth's triumph, yet she felt there was little hopes for him, boy that he was, contending with two powerful savages. In the midst of her devout supplications, a strange medley of cries rose upon the night, and was followed by a savage yell, the crash of firearms, and the shouts of combatants.

The savage ceased paddling, as if paralyzed by the sound; and, for a moment, he seemed undecided as to the course he should pursue. He dipped the paddle, turned and whirled the craft in one direction, then in another.

Maggie could now see his motions, for the moon had now sailed up above the eastern forest and flooded the lake with a sheen of mellow light. She saw, also, that he was dressed in the garb of a chief, and was the same individual that she and Seth had seen that day pacing along the margin of the lake.

In a moment the chief regained his composure, and sent the boat rapidly toward the shore; but with a fickleness unbecoming a chief, he soon changed his mind again, and turned into a little island, and landed. He assisted Maggie from the boat, and, conducting her to the interior of the island, spread his blanket upon the ground for her to be seated. Tired and weary, in both body and mind, the maiden availed herself of his proffered kindness; and when seated, he lifted the edges of the blanket and wrapped them about her shoulders.

"Let the white maiden rest easy, for no harm shall come to her now," the young chief said, in good English.

Maggie started at the sound of his voice, for it struck her as being familiar. She endeavored to recall the faces of the Indians she had known and heard during the days of peace; but among the many that had frequented the Agency, she could remember no face to which the voice belonged. Recovering her power of speech she answered:

"Why, then, have I been taken from my people?"

"Why does the maiden pluck the rose from the parent stem?" was his answer.

Maggie made no answer.

"It is because she loves the flower," the chief answered, "and that is why I have taken the white rose of the pale-faces."

"You were not with my captors last night," she answered.

"My warriors were," he answered. "Long has Hawk-Eyes loved the white maiden and wanted her for a wife. He has spared her life that she might brighten up his lodge with the light of her face."

"Then you may," answered Maggie, indignantly, "never be your wife,"

"Let my white rose remember that her people are all dead, and that Hawk-Eyes is her best friend, now."

"Hawk-Eyes tells a falsehood!" reiterated the maiden, scornfully, "and I hate him for it. My friends are not all dead."

"Ugh! the white rose has thorns that are concealed," the chief answered sarcastically, for her retort cut sharply into his cowardly spirit; "but they are harmless," he added, mockingly.

"A brave chief would not mock a feeble, helpless girl. He dare not face," the friend I left on the island and speak thus to me."

"Hawk-Eyes fears not the dead," was the savage's reply, that fairly crushed the maiden's heart; but she bravely concealed her emotions from her tormentor. Upon reflection she took courage. She knew her captor's assertion was made without any positive knowledge as to whether Seth had been slain or not, for they had left before the struggle had been decided between her friend and the savages.

The discharge of firearms, the shouts, yells, and strange cries that rent the night soon after their departure from the island, had died out, and a deep silence reigned. Pretty Maggie noticed that her captor betrayed uneasiness, yet he endeavored to conceal it, in every way possible, from her.

Suddenly a shout rung across the lake, that seemed to increase the chief's fears, and he at once embarked in the dugout for other quarters. Something in the sound he had heard convinced him that it was not safe to tarry longer; and what gave him uneasiness and fear, gave Maggie hope and courage.

The chief plied his paddle with extreme caution, and darted from one island to another, pausing to rest and listen whenever under the shadows of an islet.

Maggie sat in front of her captor, her head bowed, and her eyes fixed on the glassy water rippling out from the side of the boat.

They had passed two or three islands and finally reached the one furthest south. It was covered with a number of tall pines that cast long, wide shadows out upon the clear water. They were creeping through this long stretch of shadows when a cry suddenly and involuntarily burst from Maggie's lips. There was a single spot in the shadow where the moonbeams, struggling through the tree-tops, fell upon the surface, as bright as if concentrated there in a focus. In this patch of light, as they paused, Maggie beheld an upturned human

face—a face white as that of a corpse and stained in spots with blood. She recognized the face; it was that of Sure Shot Seth!

CHAPTER XIV.

A MYSTERIOUS CHARMER.

To return to the island where we left Sure Shot Seth engaged with a savage, is to follow up the events that have been rapidly crowding upon us.

The struggle of our hero had lasted but for a moment only, when he succeeded in getting the muzzle of his revolver against the savage's temple, and fired. This ended the hand-to-hand conflict; but scarcely had he time to realize his victory, ere he caught the dip of a number of oars and the heavy swash of a long bateau plowing its way through the water at a fearful speed.

Simultaneous with this discovery, the bark of a fox, the howl of a wolf, the scream of a panther, the hoot of an owl, the cry of a night-hawk and other sounds rose upon the night, filling the soul of Seth with joy; for in the sounds he recognized the presence of his friends, the Boy Brigade. With a shout he answered them, then ran around the island and met them where they landed. Maggie's father and Tom Grayson accompanied them, and almost the first words of the former was an inquiry after his child.

Seth had scarcely time to answer ere the savages landed on the opposite side of the island, and with a yell came rushing across toward our friends. The moon now lit up the surroundings and the whites were enabled to see the dusky forms of the enemy quite distinctly; in an instant a dozen rifles rung forth on the night.

There was no telling how many fell, but, with a random discharge of their guns, the savages quickly sought shelter behind the rocks, and silence followed.

The red-skins had evidently been surprised, or were ignorant of the number that confronted them; and the result of the collision could be determined now only by stratagem and cunning.

"To hole, ye gory critters!" yelled old Joyful Jim, who had allied himself to the Brigade, and numbered himself as "one of the boys."

A defiant yell answered him.

Only a wall of rocks running across the island like the fin of a fish's back now separated the enemies. On the Indians' side it rose perpendicular to the height of ten feet, and on our friends' side it was a little shelving and of the same height. It varied in width from ten to thirty feet. To pass from one side to the other they would have to go around the ends of the wall, which would force them close upon the water's brink. But neither party seemed desirous of gaining the opposite side for the sake of a fight. Each concluded to act upon the defensive, being ignorant of each other's force.

In a few words Sure Shot Seth made known the circumstances under which he and Maggie Harris had been separated a few minutes before.

Mr. Harris groaned in spirit over the hope he had been so fondly cherishing of recovering his child.

"I'm going to try and get away from here at once," said Seth, "and hunt Maggie up. I dare say her captor will wait among the islands the result of his friends' attack here; and, if so, I may creep around and rescue her. She was in the power of but one savage when I last saw her."

"Creepin' tarrapins!" exclaimed Joyful Jim, "thar's just about as much likelihood of your findin' that Ingin and gal to-night as thar is of old Inkpaduta becomin' an angel."

"I'll try it, nevertheless," answered Seth, in a whisper; "one cannot tell what he can do, nor what he cannot do, until he has tried. Mr. Harris, I will leave my gun and accoutrements with you, as I will have to swim away from here. My knife is all that I want."

"Boy," said old Jim, "I'm afraid you'll git a pellet of lead into your system. I dare say they're watchin' in' out for us."

"Then, my friends, we must watch out for them."

"Faith, and that we will," said Teddy O'Roop.

"Seth knows his old friends," said Justin Gray.

"And can trust his new ones," said Tom Grayson.

"It requires no words to assure me of this," answered Sure Shot Seth.

The young rifleman divested himself of his weapons and such outward clothing as he could dispense with. Then he crept down to the water's edge and entered the lake. He swam off on his back, his head and face alone being visible on the moonlit surface of the water. His friends trembled with the fear that the savages would see him and bring their guns to bear upon him. Nor were their fears without foundation. Seth was scarcely three rods from shore ere a rifle rung out over the wall and a bullet, striking the water obliquely, skimmed along the surface of the lake. This shot was immediately followed by two more that cut the water close to the face of the swimmer.

Those on the island were unable to cover his retreat. There was no way by which they could reach the top of the rock that separated them from the foe, while the latter were afforded this means by the slight inclination of their side of the wall. Not to be outdone, however, Hoeseah, the Indian lad, suddenly darted out from under the ledge, and, uttering the sharp cry of a wolf, leaped straight into the air, at the same time throwing his rifle at a level before him; and just as his head came up even with the top of the rock he fired. A yell of agony on the opposite side of the wall told how fatal had been his shot, notwithstanding the manner in which it had been made.

This caused a diversion in Seth's favor; and before another shot could be fired the friends of the young

rifleman had the pleasure of seeing him disappear around a little island in the distance.

Finding themselves defeated in slaying Seth, the savages mounted the rock and, rushing across the top, thought to take the whites by surprise and shoot them down. But, before they could fire, the Brigade darted under the ledge, entirely out of sight, and, gliding along the wall to each end, secured a position and opened fire on the red-skins, causing them to beat a hasty retreat to the other side.

"Yoop, ye rollicking smoky-skinned Satani!" yelled Joyful Jim, "jist come over on our side if ye want to be snaked into purgatory. We're the lolly-pops that can kink yer systems wusser than a green persimmon. Yoop! tempest in a tea-pot, possum in a holler! I'm beginnin' to feel fightish, and fust thing ye know I'll bulge through this wall and tackle the hull Ingin nation. I'm feelin' real awful—superbunfustic. I can't hold myself much longer."

"Kape cool, Joyful Jim," said Teddy O'Roop, "and save yer fire for the struggle that's sure to come soon-wirra!"

A shadow passed over the speaker and a stone fell in the lake beyond.

"The bloody devils are beginning to throw stones over here in hopes of crushing us," said Tom Grayson.

Our friends were again obliged to avail themselves of the protection of the shelving wall, for the stones were now raining down on their side like hail, while they had no chance to return the "compliment." In fact, the savages possessed the most advantageous position, being enabled to scale the wall at pleasure, and with impunity.

For fully five minutes the missiles hurtled through the air. Suddenly there was a crash. A stone had fallen into the canoe—a long, frail bark concern—and stove a hole through the bottom, rendering it perfectly useless. This left our friends in a rather precarious situation, and served to increase their fears.

A yell from the savages told their gloating triumph; but it was immediately answered by a strange medley of shouts and cries from the Brigade. The whites, also, began to return the shower of stones as soon as they dare venture from under the ledge; and the groans and cries of excitement which came from the opposite side told that the reds were being dangerously disturbed, as they had not the advantage of a shelter that their enemies possessed.

This hurting of stones was kept up until it became unendurable by savage patience and fortitude, and with a wild yell they charged around the eastern end of the wall. The whites were not taken unawares, and a deadly struggle ensued. But it was brief as it was desperate. The savages were driven back to their own side, while a shout rung forth upon the air from the lips of the victorious Brigade.

"Och, now," exclaimed Teddy O'Roop, "and isn't it delicious fun, b'ys?"

"Tish fun very much," replied young Schultz.

"Hark! hark!" cried Justin Gray.

With bated breath all listened.

A sound, soft and weird as the strains of an Eolian harp, floated to every ear. Every sound became hushed by the magic power of the mysterious music. Even the waves seemed to still their murmur and listen enchanted.

A shadow fell across the rock that separated the foes—a vision appeared upon its summit. It was the vision of a woman—the author of these enchanting strains of melody.

The hazy moonlight; the sylph-like proportions of the figure; the gray, mist-like robe that enveloped it; the white face, and flowing wealth of flaxen hair gave the mysterious creature upon the rock a vague, spiritual form, and enshrouded it in a nimbus that partook of the light of a celestial being. In her arms she held a harp over which her white fingers danced and flashed like ripples of sunshine; while her face, clothed in the radiance of womanly love, was lifted toward heaven; and her lips poured forth an accompaniment to the harp that would have melted the stoniest heart and soothed the wildest brain.

The scene was indeed wondrous. The night; the little forest-girded lake; the rocky island; the savages motionless upon one side as the unconscious forms stiffening at their feet, and their painted faces upturned toward the strange visitant—not contorted with wild frenzy, but mute with solemn awe and mysterious admiration; while on the other side stood our friends, rooted to the spot with surprise by the sudden change from the terrors of battle to the enchanting strains of music.

Neither whites nor reds had seen the strange musician approach; and where she had come from was a question beyond their comprehension.

Silent and unmoved, she stood upon the rock and sent forth those sweet seductive strains, whose melody awoke a feeling in the breasts of the audience that they had scarcely ever experienced. The heart of each seemed to leap forth in response to the silvery notes, while the soul became inspired by the sounds that seemed born of heaven itself.

Thus for all of ten minutes the unknown continued to play; then, as the last note faded away like the vision of a dream, she turned, and in a tone soft as a flute's, said:

"Oh, why do my red and white friends fight and slay each other?"

A profound stillness followed. The question was repeated; and from the Boy Brigade came the response:

"We are enemies."

"But you are brothers—of the same human family," again spoke the angel of peace whose sweet young face looked down upon the astonished foes with heaven's serenity, while she clasped her white hands over her breast, and pitching her voice into

an appealing tone, cried out: "Oh, my brothers! red and white; cease your struggles here. You are all brave, but this is not an honorable battle-field."

"The red men have dug up the hatchet," said a savage, in a clear, full tone that was distinctly heard by the Brigade.

"Then go to the woods and fight where the vanquished can have a chance for life," answered the fair unknown. "Already my red brothers have lost half of their friends, while my white brothers are strong as when they came. Go, red-men; take your boat and depart, and the Great Spirit will be pleased."

Under any other circumstances the savages would have received this request with derision; but their loss of men and impending destruction made them more considerate of her appeals.

"If we leave here, the pale-faces will slay us," said a warrior.

"I, Heaven's Messenger of Peace and Mercy, will, on behalf of my white brothers, promise you a safe retreat from this island. The pale-faces are not cowards, and they will respect a woman's wish."

"Fair bein'," exclaimed old Joyful Jim, "of heaven, of earth, of air, or wherever ye mout be from, we have no respect for a red-skin, I am sorry to say; but we'd be wusser than heathens not to respect the wish of an angel, wouldn't we, boys?"

"Yes, yes," was the unanimous response.

"Then, let my red brothers depart hence in peace," said the songstress.

The savages were only too glad to obey, and in a moment they had all embarked for the shore. There were scarcely a dozen rods from the island ere the maiden on the rock came nearer and said, in a natural tone:

"Repair your boat, friends, and flee, or you may never again have the chance."

She spoke excitedly, and her voice and form now seemed more of earth than heaven.

"Who in the wisdom of Solomon be you?" asked old Jim, glancing up at her with a quizzical look.

"Vishnia of the Valley," she answered, with an anxious, impatient gesture, at the same time glancing uneasily around her.

Several of the boys flew to the damaged boat, and, dragging it up on the beach, set to work to repair the injuries, which could only be effected by contributions of superfluous clothing stuffed into the gaping rent. While they were thus employed, Mr. Harris stood and conversed with Vishnia of the Valley.

"Vishnia, where do you reside?" he asked.

"In the valley of the Minnesota, with my father, whose mission on earth is love and truth, and the inculcation of the principles of peace and glory of God," she answered.

"But how came you here?" he asked.

"As I now depart," she said, and, tripping down from the wall, she sprang into a canoe, that was so small her robe almost concealed it from view. Then lifting a light paddle, and wishing our friends a God speed, she darted away over the waters with wondrous rapidity, and soon disappeared from view.

"Great shockin'!" exclaimed Joyful Jim, "she's a sort of a star of the first magnitude, ar'n't she boys? Bless my eyes, if I'd mind marryin' such a woman as that, though I a'ders swore that I'd never marry the pur—"

"All aboard!" cried one of the boys, as they launched the boat ready for departure.

The next moment all had embarked for the nearest point on the western shore of the lake, and where the tumult of battle had waged a few minutes before, the silence of death now reigned.

CHAPTER XV. A SECRET COUNCIL.

MAGGIE HARRIS was paralyzed by sight of the face she had seen in the water. Unable to move, unable to cry out, she sat motionless, with fixed eyes staring at the little patch of moonlight. But she saw the face of him she loved no more. The distance and gloom had enshrouded it, and her heart sunk in despondency.

Hawk-Eyes used the paddle nervously and awkwardly, which would have been evidence to any one versed in the nature of the Indian that he—the chief—was not a red-skin. Maggie mistrusted as much from the first; and as it gave her no relief to think that he was a white person in disguise, she dismissed the matter from her mind.

Slowly they made their way toward the southern shore, and were already wit in the deep border of darkness that skirted the margin of the water when there was a sudden commotion alongside the boat; a dull, heavy blow, a groan, and the fall of a body into the water. The boat rocked violently; Maggie was almost thrown into the lake, and before she could recover from her fright, a voice said:

"Maggie!"

A low, subdued cry burst from Maggie's lips, for she recognized the voice as that of Sure Shot Seth. The youth had swum silently up to the boat, and by a well-directed blow knocked the chief overboard. Then, having made his presence known, he sprang into the boat, and, having addressed a few words of cheer and assurance to the maiden, took up the paddle and drove the boat ashore.

Having landed and assisted Maggie from the canoe, he conducted her rapidly away around the lake. He was satisfied that he had not slain the young chief, and that his cries would soon set a horde upon their trail; and so the greatest precaution and haste were essential to escape.

They had gone but a short distance when the sound of voices fell upon Seth's ears. He stopped and listened, and, by the sound of the speakers' voices, discovered they were savages. A groan told

him that there were wounded warriors among them; and he felt satisfied they were the Indians who had engaged his friends at the island. And this now forced the query upon him: who had been victors? his friends or the savages?

A figure swept suddenly past them, going toward the Indians. His movements were heavy and clumsy—evidence of excitement and want of savage precaution. He was no Indian; of this Seth was assured, and a moment later he found he was correct. The figure reached the Indians and began talking in plain English, but in an excited tone.

"Seth, do you not recognize that voice?" asked Maggie, clinging closer to her young friend.

"It sounds familiar, but I really can't place it," answered Seth.

"It's the voice of Hawk-Eyes, that Boy Chief, whom you threw overboard."

"Sorry, then, that I didn't kill him."

"Seth, he is not an Indian. He is a white boy in disguise," affirmed the maiden.

"What? Hawk-Eyes a white boy and a Sioux war-chief?" exclaimed Seth.

"Yes."

"Then we have more to fear than if he was a savage. A white Indian has a less human heart than a genuine Indian."

"Where, then, shall we go?" asked the maiden.

"Let us bear off to the left, and edge around to the north. There is no telling where we will be safe now. The wood is full of enemies, and the Agency closely besieged."

"Seth, you are endangering your life for me," said Maggie; "it is better that I—"

"Not a word, Maggie," interrupted the gallant youth; "it is the greatest pleasure I ever enjoyed to be enabled to protect you. Moreover, I owe you all this; had it not been for you and Emma, I would have been slain there where Le Clercq and his companions bound me. It was your own hands, Maggie, that liberated me from that tree, and had you not gone there for that purpose you would never have been captured. So you see I am indebted to you."

"I blame Ivan Le Clercq for all our present troubles."

"And at the same time, Maggie, I can't say that I am sorry he acted as he did," said Seth, in a slightly hesitating voice.

"Why, Seth?" she asked, in surprise.

"Because I might never have met you."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, involuntarily, and something of the truth flashed across her mind, sending the warm blood coursing through her veins.

They moved on a few moments in silence; but the thoughts of each were busy. A dozen times Maggie asked herself if Seth had been actuated in his motives of kindness toward her by a feeling greater than friendship. She wanted only the assurance of this fact to make her supremely happy, notwithstanding their danger. On the other hand, Seth was laboring under the same anxiety and uncertainty.

Maggie was the first to break the silence.

"Have you seen Ivan Le Clercq since the shooting-match?" she asked.

"I have not; his four friends, however, were with your father and Tom Grayson this morning; but I gave them no chance to identify me, and I presume they all think Sure Shot Seth is dead."

"I hope Ivan and his friends may know no different until their conscience has punished them severely," said Maggie.

They moved slowly onward through the lonely halls of the forest. Weary miles were traversed; but they brought the tired fugitives to no point of safety.

The morning dawn was fast breaking into the light of another day, when the glow of a fire burst suddenly upon their gaze. It was not more than twenty rods away, and it required no second glance to tell Seth that it was the camp-fire of whites. There were four of them—all boys; and to the surprise of both Seth and Maggie, they beheld the companions of Ivan Le Clercq. They were seated before the fire, apparently in close conversation.

Seth was undecided as to the course he should pursue; but, before he could arrive at any conclusion, he saw a young Indian chief emerge from the woods beyond and approach the boys with quick strides.

Maggie uttered a little cry at sight of him, while Seth's hand sought the weapon at his belt.

It was Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, who was welcomed by the four youths to their camp-fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

SURE SHOT SETH was astounded by what he had seen, and trembled for the safety of the fair girl at his side. They occupied a position not altogether secure from the keen eyes of a savage, and the first act of the youth was to retrace his footsteps and gain the friendly cover of a dense thicket. Then he turned to Maggie and said, in a subdued tone:

"Maggie, I must know more about those boys. There is some treachery going on, and if I can learn the object of their interview with the chief, I may be able to save those at the Agency. I am going to try to overhear their interview."

"Be very, very careful, Seth," Maggie answered. "With a word or two of caution, Seth moved away. Maggie watched him out of sight, then sat down."

He approached the party, keeping a clump of bushes between. He gained a position within ear-shot, and, pausing, listened. He heard Hawk-Eyes ask:

"Do the pale-face youths know that Sure Shot Seth is dead?" He spoke in good English, but in a tone evidently disguised and unnatural.

"We found the skeleton of one whom we believe was Sure Shot Seth," answered Rube Johnson.

"Do the settlers mistrust anything of the truth?" the chief asked.

Seth saw at once that the chief was there to confer with the four boys by appointment, and that there was some kind of an understanding between them.

"I am afraid they do," answered young Johnson; "just last night I had a conversation with Emma Milbank, and in speaking of 'Tom Grayson gittin' beat at the shootin'-match, she got mad as fire. You know what a little spitefire she is when she gets mad; and as she's sweeter'n maple molasses on Tom, why, she won't hear anything against him; and so she up and says: 'You'd better not say much about that shootin'-match, for there's a secret connected with it that might hang somebody I know.'"

"Then, by heavens, she knows all about it!" exclaimed Hawk-Eyes, forgetting the dignity of his position as a war-chief, and betraying no little excitement and cowardly fear.

Seth started at the change in his voice.

"Yes," he heard Rube Johnson continue, "I believe she and Maggie seen Sure Shot Seth tied up to the tree, and know who did it."

"And as sure as it is found out, we'll all catch an invitation to court," said Gus Stewart.

"Between the Indians, and the fear of punishment, we'll have no rest for—well, God only knows how long," said Abe Thorne, in a tone of penitence. "I wish we had left him alone, for after all, The Eagle-from-Sky-Puncher-Peak got the gun."

"Do not fear the Indians," said Hawk-Eyes, "for if you show them no hostility, I will assure you of their friendship."

"Good!" exclaimed Rube; "why not join the Indians at once and be done with it?"

"That would never do. I want you to work for me in the Agency. You can place both Maggie and Emma in my power, and then you will have nothing to fear from them. I expect to remain an Indian chief. But a few days ago, Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, was slain, and I have taken both his name and rank, and have sworn to exterminate half of Minnesota's whites."

"Just so, my worthy young villain," said Sure Shot, to himself; "I thin' you'll have to swear to that again."

"But," continued Johnson, "we are afraid to return home, and had concluded to skulk and hide around in the woods until assured, it'd be safe to go back."

"I think your friends have need of all their forces to keep the besiegers away, and that they'll have no time to investigate Sure Shot Seth's case."

"Well, we will hang around in the woods awhile, anyhow; and if the Indians capture the fort, we'll be outside," Rube put in.

"I'm for just going right home and makin' a clean breast of it all," said Abe Thorne, "and take the risk. We can tell 'em that we war in fun with Seth; and mebbe they'll let us off. I'd rather be shot than hid in 'round in the woods and startin' and shudderin' at every sound just like a guilty murderer."

"Hear Abe whine, will you?" sneered Gus; "he's been a-tryin' to crawfish in this matter ever since last night."

"Boys, I have an old mother dependin' on me for her daily bread, and I cannot desert her," Abe protested.

"Then I suppose you'll desert us, turn State's evidence, and let us swing," suggested Ches Pagan.

"No, I will do no such thing; I want to git all out of this scrape in an honorable way," persisted Abe. "You'll get out in no such way as you propose," replied Rube, indignantly, "for you can't make crime honorable."

"I have a right to do as I please," was Abe's reply.

"You may have the right, but not the liberty," was the threat of Hawk-Eyes.

"I want to do what is honorable with you all; but I will not be driven to add crime to crime. I have gone just as far as I'm going in this matter, and I'll return to the Agency. If you fellows go with me, all right; if not, all right. I shall keep silent, however, until I am called upon to tell the truth in this matter."

"Yes, you confounded coward," exclaimed Rube, "you mean to betray us all."

"I mean to do just what I say, and you can't scare me into anything else, either," was Abe's response, given in a tone of unflinching determination.

"Then go, seek your skim-milk mates—go!" and Rube spoke in a tone of authority.

Abe Thorne rose to his feet, his boyish face flushed with anger, and his eyes blazing with indignation. "Abe had not been hopelessly lost in wickedness; nor had his companions; but he was, by nature, both kind and honest. He was rather wild and reckless, yet had no desire to commit crime; and he shrunk from the idea of trying to conceal the supposed death of Seth in the way proposed by Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief."

Taking up his rifle, the youth spoke a few parting words to his companions, then turned and moved away.

The eyes of the Boy Chief followed his retreating form with a fierce, murderous look that caused Seth to start with sudden fear. That violence was uppermost in the young villain's mind there was not a doubt in the world.

Seth watched the conspirators until Abe was out of sight, then he turned and crept back to where Maggie was waiting for him.

"Maggie," he said, his voice betraying no little surprise, "I am completely shocked, for I have made a discovery that will no doubt surprise you. Ivan Le Clercq and Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, are one and the same person!"

CHAPTER XVII.

WAS IT THE SHOT OF AN ASSASSIN?

A RIFLE-SHOT rung suddenly through the forest, starting Seth and Maggie with sudden fear. The report was followed by a groan, and that Abe Thorne's friends had assassinated him, Seth had not a single doubt; for the look the young villain, Hawk-Eyes, gave him when he turned to leave, meant mischief. "I am afraid," said Seth, "that they have murdered poor Abe, for they quarreled with him, and he left them."

"If Hawk-Eyes is Ivan Le Clercq, as you say, he will not hesitate to do anything," replied Maggie. "Why are you afraid they have killed Abe Thorne?" Seth briefly narrated all that he had heard at the camp-fire conference.

Scarcely had he concluded, ere a peculiar cry rung forth upon the air—a cry that sent a smile of recognition over his young face. Then, from different quarters among the wooded hills, rose half a dozen answering cries, plain and distinct.

"Ah! my friends, the Boy Brigade, are near," said Seth.

A fierce savage yell rung through the forest, then the sharp, stinging report of a rifle followed, only to be succeeded by other shots fired in rapid succession.

The boy conspirators started to their feet, and, like so many frightened deer, bounded away into the woods, while Hawk-Eyes turned and crept through the shadows in the direction whence the sounds of conflict came.

"Maggie," said Seth, "my friends are near and engaged with the savages. You will be safe here for a while, and I will go to their assistance; but return, you soon. If we succeed in defeating the foe, our escape will be certain."

"Go, Seth, to your friends' assistance. I will await your return," said the brave little maiden.

Seth crept away through the woods, and soon came in sight of the combatants. He placed a whistle to his lips and blew a sharp blast upon it. Instantly, from different quarters, rose the answering cry of the Boy Brigade.

A savage yell answered the latter.

A deep hollow divided the foes, who were concealed in the timber that crowned the summits of the bluffs. But not a friend or foe could Seth see. He could see, however, a little cloud of smoke puff up from behind a tree, now and then, telling him where the combatants were.

Keeping well under cover, he moved on toward his Brigade.

"Ho-ah! thar!" suddenly exclaimed a voice overhead.

Seth looked up and saw Joyful Jim, the trader, perched upon a limb loading his gun. His head was bare, and across his forehead was a long wound or abrasion, from which a little rivulet of blood was running down each side of his face. The body of the tree screened him from Indian bullets.

"Why, Jim!" exclaimed Seth, "what are you doing up there?"

"Punchin' red-skins, Seth," was the laconic reply.

"It seems to me they've been stripping your head."

"Yes, the 'arnal sulphurians knocked the bark off my frontispiece, and sprung a leak in my system. Gallons of the best blood, unadulterated with cold water, have evaporated, but it'll soon return in a copious shower to relinquish and fructify the earth."

"My old friend," said Seth, "a red-skin'll get sight of you, first thing you know, and put a bullet through your system."

"I'll risk it, Seth; besides, I'm up here where I can see how the cat jumps and warn the boys. Oh, I tell ye, it's a de-lightful sport, Seth—this Inga fightin'." "Used to furnish the 'arnal smoky-skinned sulphurians their spirits; now by a little tapping process with powder and lead, I extract their spirits. Don't you perceive the difference with half an eye?"

"Do you know the force of the enemy?" asked Seth.

"Now nothin'; you can't count snakes that are in their holes. But I opine thar's quite a number of 'em—say half a million or less of the superbunfused varmints."

"Are the boys all afoot yet?"

"Yes; and perambulating red-skins over the Jording at a lively rate. I tell ye, Seth, your Boy Brigade are a regular set of young squackers on the foot. But, looky here, whar's that go?"

"Safe for the time being," answered Seth.

"Good," ejaculated Joyful Jim; then, having capped his ride, he began peering cautiously around the tree for a red-skin; but before he had the chance of a second shot, a fierce yell rose in the rear, starting both with a shudder of terror.

"Planked, by the New Jerusalem!" exclaimed old Jim, turning and glancing toward the horde swarming through the woods upon them.

Seth took to his heels, feeling in the direction of his friends.

The savages on the opposite bluff charged from that direction.

Joyful Jim started down the tree, but he saw at a glance that he could not escape the foe, and so changed his notion and climbed higher among the branches in hopes the savages would not discover him.

Sure Shot Seth soon came to where his friend, the Beaver, was, and together the two ran on toward the valley. Others of the Brigade fell in with them, and by the time they had gone fifty rods, the whole of the band, including Maggie Harris's father and Tom Grayson, had joined them.

The Indians, now to the number of nearly a hundred, were in pursuit of them. Sure Shot Seth led the way toward the precipitous bluff that overhung

the head of the valley, and which he knew to be honeycombed with numerous caverns and subterranean passages where one might elude an enemy with ease. To reach the mouth of one of those passages required but a few moments, and no sooner were they under cover than all turned and poured a deadly volley into the ranks of the advancing enemy. A number of the latter fell; but their death only served to madden their surviving friends, who, like demons, came on toward the cavern, determined on exterminating the band of whites.

That the savages were ignorant of the advantage of which our friends had availed themselves, was evident from the incautious manner in which they approached. The Brigade fell back a few paces from the entrance, and, facing about, waited until the foe came up, when from the black mouth of the vault they poured another withering volley. This caused the enemy to retreat with a full knowledge of the situation, and, for the time being, all relapsed into silence.

"Well, here we are cooped up like so many fowls," said Justin Gray, "and are likely to remain so for a while."

"Night let us out," said Hooseah, the Indian lad. "Och! and it's meself knows what will let us out without a doubt," remarked Teddy O'Roop.

"What?" eagerly question young Judd.

"Death, be jabers!"

"Ay, Ted; this is no jesting matter," said young Gray, soberly, "for other lives depend upon our safety."

"What of Maggie, Seth?" asked Mr. Harris, recovering breath.

"I left her alive and well," was the answer; "but God knows what will be her fate ere we escape from this place."

The father groaned in spirit, and with heart beating in agony, he listened to Seth's recital of his adventures since he had rescued Maggie. When he broke the news of Ivan Le Clercq's traitorous conduct, Tom Grayson started as though pierced by a dagger. He could scarcely credit the statement, yet the absence of Le Clercq and his sudden disappearance went, in a measure, to corroborate the young rifleman's story.

While most of the brigade guarded the entrance to the cave, Seth and Tom Grayson set off in search of an outlet. They found the passage sinuous as a serpent's path, and in places reduced in size, so that it was with difficulty they were enabled to pass on. The passages also rose and fell at irregular intervals, but finally took an upward slant, which led the boys to believe they would succeed in finding the sought-for exit. In this, however, they were disappointed. The slope finally terminated in a network of roots, stone and dirt. They were satisfied, nevertheless, that it was not far to the surface, and a few hours' tunneling would admit them to the open air. Before they could decide upon any definite course, further than that already arrived at, the sullen roar of a rifle rolled through the resonant chambers of the vault.

"By gracious!" exclaimed Tom Grayson, "they're having a fight down at the entrance."

"Come," said Seth, as discharge after discharge boomed through the cavern.

They hurried back and found their friends engaged with the savages who were trying to force an entrance. But being in the dark, and each provided with a revolver, and some with a pair, the boys were enabled to hold their position against ten times their number, and so the savages were driven off. A yell of defiance and triumph followed the red-skins, who, in dismay, sought shelter behind trees where they could watch the mouth of the cavern.

A close watch was now kept upon the movements of the enemy, but no further demonstration was made during the day. As the shadows of night gathered outside, the brigade began to discuss the subject of escape. To Seth, the day had seemed a wreck. The thought of Maggie was never absent from his mind, and in his anxiety to return to her, time seemed to drag on leaden feet.

It was nearly dark outside, and all arrangements for escape were perfected, when, to the sudden surprise and dismay of all, the bright glare of a light suddenly lit up the mouth of the cavern. The enemy had lighted a number of fires near it, destroying all hopes of our friends' escape that way for the time being.

"Oh, my child! my child!" groaned Harris, in bitter despair.

"Let us not despair; perhaps we can tunnel out," said Seth.

"Let us try at once," suggested Tom Grayson.

With Teddy O'Roop, Sure Shot Seth repaired to the extremity of the cavern, and with knives and tomahawks began the uncertain task of digging out. Their labors were attended with difficulty. The darkness prevented them working with dispatch. The knife and tomahawk clinked on the stones, and sparks of fire were emitted by the contact. If they were near the surface, and an enemy should happen to pass that way, he would be sure to hear the sound of their working; so, altogether there was nothing to insure escape, even should they succeed in working a way out. However, Seth resolved to lose no time in testing the result, for the pretty, fair face of Maggie Harris stood before his mind in constant appeal for help and protection.

They worked diligently for nearly an hour; but scarcely had the sounds of their own blows died away ere Teddy grasped Seth by the arm and in an excited whisper said:

"Whist, Sith, me b'y!"

They listened intently. They heard a sound. It was so very faint they could not locate the point from which it came. It seemed dull and far off.

"It must be the echoes of our knife and toma-

hawk still reverberating through the cavern," said Seth.

"Niver, lad, niver. Press yer ear against this wall and ye'es can hear something or some one digging."

Seth did as requested. He started, with the reply:

"You are right, Ted; there is some one digging within a foot of our cavern wall. But who can it be?"

A. If in answer to the question, the left wall of the cavern fell inward, revealing a passage beyond. A cloud of dust rose in the cavern, but through the black fog thus pervading the place a dim light suddenly appeared, and behind it was a fearful human visage!

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SPOILED COUNTERPENCE.

"HOLY MOTHER!" burst from Teddy's lips, as his eyes fell upon the horrible-looking visage, bloated and distorted.

Sure Shot Seth started back in amazement, his eyes fixed upon the face just visible, through the cloud of dust, in the lurid, wavering light clutched in a bony hand.

The face was contorted like that of the demon of rage. It was covered with dirt and blood, while the wet, matted hair hung in twisted, serpent-like locks about his face, like the hair of the Furies.

"Haw! haw! haw! Lurist in a deep, sonorous peal from his lip, the sound starting a shudder in the hearers, as the echo's repeated the fiend-like guffaw over and over in a hundred places throughout the cavern.

Seth grasped his revolver. The click of the lock brought the man to a sense of his situation, and in a more natural tone, he said:

"Boys, don't you know me? Can't you perceive who I be?"

"Joyful Jim!" exclaimed Seth, dropping his weapon.

"The same," exclaimed the old man, creeping through the opening into the retreat; "though I'm to be 'unfused!"

"What in the name of goodness have you been doing?" asked Seth, completely astounded.

"Havin' an old roarin' time of it by myself among the red-skins and hornits," answered Jim.

"And how came you here?"

"I came through that back passage, which, with a little digging, led me in here. I aers thought that but a few feet separated the two caverns, but never had occasion to find out," he answered.

"Good! then our escape is certain."

"Perrumse so; but is the boys all afoot? Glad to hear it. But I tell you I had a narry escape, Sure Shot," Jim continued. "You see, I hadn't time to get out of that tree, and so I advised myself to climb a little higher. The Imps passed on arter you ones, and I s'posed all I had to do was to get down and off; but no sooner had I begun my descent than pop! a snail took me like an arrow that jist forced a clear path right outen me. Then I heard a noise below, and looked down; and, great rage of the Furies! thar stood two Imps looking up at me, smiling like Judas 'Sear' o't."

"The bloody spalpeens!" interrupted O'Roop.

"What to do," continued Jim, "I couldn't, for the life of me, tell. I knowed they'd salt me, and expected 'em to up and lere me right through; but instead, they invited me down. In course, I was gentleman enough to accept of their request, and begun my descent. The good Lord only knows the thousands and thousands of things that darted through my mind as I climbed down that tree; and one thing that did dart I remember very well. It was a big, healthy hornit with a javelin like a harpoon. The 'arnal critter came aloft on airy wing and plumped its 'arnal pison barb right into the end of my nose; and afore half a second it had swelled up big as a unicorn's proboscis. I fired an awful savage malediction at that insect and went on down, to the amusement of them red-skins. I war nearly to the ground when I heard an awful buzzin' near my ears, and lookin' around, I see'd a hornit's nest about the size of a hay-cock hangin' among the branches, not two feet from me. A big hornit whisked out of the nest just as I set eyes on it, and spat! it took me. But it poked an idea into my head just as it did its javelin; and reachin' out, I grabbed the nest, tore it from the lough and dashed it down into the very faces of them royal red dewdrops that war waitin' to slip off my hair. Oh, great fury! you had ort to 'a' heard 'em. Ten million hornits, by actual count, waited out of their overthrown palaces and attacked 'em. I jumped to the ground and run into a thicket, and throwin' myself on the ground, eluded further persecution, though a million of 'em followed me, but findin' I'd give 'em the slip, they went back and took a crack at the red-skins. I never see'd sich squimmin' in all my days, and I laid thar in them bushes and jist shook with laughter till I settled myself a foot in the ground. Why, then, half-naked red-skins jist rolled, and clawed, and kicked, and floundered, and pounded, and hollered wusser'n a hundred fiends smokin' hot from Hades. I jist laffed and huffed till the bushes got to shakin', and then to dancin', and if ever there was a gay old time, it was then and thar. Them red-skins got stung so that they pulled up wusser than an inflated bladder. They could not lay on the hillside, and so rolled into the valley, and as I couldn't do 'em any good, and thar bein' several stray hornits hangin' back as a reserve ready to lance their harpoons into anything that might show itself, I vacated that vicinity in blooded-racer style. I retreated south, and as I war makin' my way along the ledge of bluffs that face the valley of the Black Woods, a growl fell upon my ear."

"A groan?" exclaimed Seth; "did you find Maggie Harris?"

"No; war thar whar you left her?"

"It was near the ledge of which you speak that I left her," replied Seth, excitedly.

"I saw nothing of her; but I found a dying boy there. It was Abe Thorne. He had been shot through the lung and was nearly gone when I got to him. He tried to talk and tell me somethin', but the seal of death was upon the poor lad's lips. He pointed this way and that. His lips moved, but I couldn't catch one word. I shouldn't wonder, Seth, but he war trying to tell me 'bout Maggie. Ah! I tell ye, boys, I war teched to the very heart. If I laughed with joy a few minutes before tell I cried, I couldn't keep back tears of pity as I looked upon that poor lad with his pale face, his quiverin' lips, and dilated nostrils, dyin' there with no mother, nor sister, nor friend's kind words to cheer him up, nor bid him adieu afore he went away into the unknown world. I stood by him till he died, then I carried the body away and buried it in the woods under a tree. It went hard to put him away without a word hein' said, seein' he was a boy. I remembered a real nice prayer that my old mother 'rart me when I was a cub, but my heart failed me when I come to say it. I war afraid the Lord would pay no attention to the prayers of a blasted old sinner like old Joyful Jim. No; I laid the boy away as nice as possible; covered him up and piled stones on the grave; then I took myself away into the woods. I crept around to the north of this hill and got into the cavern, enterin' from that side. I've been diggin' thar four solid hours."

"Poor Abe Thorne!" said Seth, "he has been slain by the hand of a boy friend, or one who pretended to be his friend. As to Maggie, I presume the Indians have got her. Fool that I was for leaving her; but then I acted, as I supposed, for the best."

"Whar's the rest of the Brigade?" asked Joyful Jim.

"At the mouth of the cavern! Let us join them at once and prepare to leave this place. I'll suffocate if I don't get into the open air soon."

They at once returned to their friends, and in a few words as possible, reported the discovery of another passage opening on the north side of the hill.

Harris became almost frenzied as he listened to Joyful Jim's story of Abe Thorne's death and the supposed capture of his daughter.

With as short delay as possible, the little band made haste to vacate the cavern. Led by Joyful Jim, they fled away through the dark passage.

The savages seemed to have instinctively anticipated their intentions and swarmed in after them. Their yells echoed in tones of thunder through the chambers of the great vault. But, nothing daunted, our friends pushed on. They finally reached the rear opening of the chamber. All halted just within, and sent old Jim out to reconnoiter. In five minutes the signal agreed upon was given, and the little band fled out and joined the scout.

"Now, which way?" asked the old man.

"Toward Lake Luster," answered Seth, and taking the lead, headed toward the south-west.

Savage cries, announcing the escape of the Boy Brigade, rose upon the night. From all points they were answered; but, silent as phantoms, our friends stalked on through the darkness, led by the indomitable young rifleman.

Seth gradually bent his course so as to bring him back to where he had left Maggie Harris; but, when he reached the point and found her gone, he said nothing but pushed on into the valley.

They soon entered what was known as the Black Woods—a deep, dark, and almost impenetrable forest, where the shadows were eternal. Stately pines reared their heads heavenward like giant sentinels; the mold in which their roots found nourishment was heavy and sodden; the atmosphere damp and depressing. Animal life seemed banished from the place, and a depressing, foreboding silence reigned there.

But this silence lasted only for a short period—a few minutes—ere voices could be heard calling to each other, from out the depths of the woods, in unnatural tones. They were savages.

Suddenly a sharp and sullen boom, not unlike that of a cannon, burst upon the night, its echoes rebounding from hill to valley and fading away in quivering intonations.

The Boy Brigade stopped and discussed the matter of the noise; but as they could form no conception as to its meaning, they pushed on through the woods. They had journeyed nearly a mile when, all of a sudden, a broad expanse of dazzling light burst upon their eyes.

They stood upon the shore of Lake Luster—the tiny jewel that sparkled upon the bosom of the grim Black Woods, as it lay bathed in the mellow beams of the full, round moon.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHITHER SHALL SHE FLY?

MAGGIE HARRIS was a brave and peerless girl. When left alone to await her young protector's return, she stilled the beating of her heart, and reconciled her mind to her situation. She could hear the firing of guns back in the woods, and knew that a desperate conflict was going on. Then, when the savages charged the Boy Brigade, and their yell rose loud and fierce upon the air, she was filled with a grave fear. But, before she had time for much speculation, a movement in the bushes arrested her attention.

She turned and beheld an object creeping along the earth, with great difficulty; and a second glance told her it was a human form. Her first impression was that a savage was creeping stealthily upon her.

A cry rose to her lips, but with supreme effort she restrained it. She recognized the voice, but not the face. The latter was haggard and covered with blood.

It was Abe Thorne.

He was wounded, and bleeding to death. Maggie moved toward him, all the kindness of her young heart weakened by sympathy for the wounded boy.

"You, Maggie? Are you alone?" asked the youth, in a feeble tone.

"Yes; but Abe, what ails you?" asked the maiden, shuddering.

"Oh, Maggie!" he cried, in a feeble tone, as he sunk upon the earth, overcome with sheer exhaustion from loss of blood; "I've been shot, and I'm going to die."

"Who shot you?—the Indians?"

"No; one whom I always knew was treacherous, yet whom I considered my friend—Ivan Le Clercq, who is now an Indian chief."

"My friend suspected as much; but, Abe, let me bind up your wounds and take care of you till help comes."

"No power on earth can save me; that I know," replied Abe. "Our troubles all come about on account of Sure Shot Seth. The day of the shooting-match Ivan and some more of us caught Seth and tied him up to a tree, so he couldn't win the prize. But the Indians came before we could release him, and he was killed while bound helpless to the tree."

"Are you sure he was killed, Abe?" questioned Maggie.

"Yes; Ivan found his form stript of flesh still lashed to the tree. The wolves had eaten him. And so you see, Maggie, I die with a heavy load upon my soul, and I'm afraid the good Lord will not forgive me."

"He will not punish you for the death of Sure Shot Seth, Abe," Maggie answered, "for Seth still lives."

Abe started as if from a dream.

"Sure Shot Seth alive!" he exclaimed. "Maggie, are you not mistaken?"

"I am not; he left me but a few minutes ago."

"Then I can die in peace," he said, again sinking to the earth; "but, Maggie, let me warn you of danger. The fear of punishment for the supposed death of Seth drove Ivan Le Clercq to the Indians, and, for some deed of valor, he was given the position lately occupied by Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief. Ivan loves you, Maggie, and he will exert every effort to get you into his power. Because I opposed further wickedness, he shot me down when I turned to leave them. I know not what the other boys will do; but I do know mother will think a deal more of me dead, dying as I do, than a living traitor. If you ever meet her, Maggie, tell her of me, and our talk. But you had better not remain here, Maggie. There are many Indians in the Black Woods bent upon the destruction of all the whites they can find."

"I cannot leave you, Abe, suffering as you are."

"I can't suffer long, Maggie, for I am nearly gone."

Overcome with emotion, Maggie sat down by the dying youth, and, burying her face in her hands, wept bitterly.

A silence, broken only by the maiden's sobs, ensued. When Maggie again turned to Abe his eyes were half closed, his lips were slightly parted, while his face wore that calm, yet awful expression of death. She supposed he was dead then; but he was not.

"Poor Abe!" sobbed the maiden; but she started at the sound of her own voice. It sounded hollow and unnatural. She glanced wildly around her. The distant report of fire-arms, the moan of the woods, and the presence of death, all conspired to fill her soul with horror. She started to her feet, then turned and fled the spot like a frightened fawn.

She ran on deeper and deeper into the shadows of the Black Woods, as though there were some irresistible power drawing her into their gloomy labyrinth. The shadows were deep as twilight, though now and then a faint stray beam of light, dim and ghostly, fell across her path.

An indescribable horror lent speed to her feet, and she glided on until her steps were arrested by a blaze of light bursting upon her from before. She found the forest had terminated in a broad sheet of glimmering water. She stood on the shore of Lake Luster. She glanced over the little sheet and around its margin. No sign of life was visible. The place seemed wrapt in profound solitude.

Deep in the bosom of the great black forest reposed the little lake. The stately pines grew out to the very shore. Their branches reached out over the water. A narrow rim of white sand encircled the lake. A border of shadows hung over all. Here and there a little cove or inlet indented the shore. Wild flowers mingled their breath with the odor of the green wood.

Half exhausted and half delirious by her violent exercise, Maggie sunk down under a tree. She leaned her throbbing head against the trunk, and clasped her hands over her beating heart. She closed her eyes and sunk into mental repose. She inhaled the fresh air and the sweet essence distilled on its breath; and, lulled by the soft cadence of the breeze among the tree-tops, she sunk into a gentle slumber, that was as sweet and refreshing as ambrosia to the lips. Even the sense of hearing was enraptured as she slept. The soft, flute-like notes of music fell upon her ears in dreams. Bright visions and enchanting scenes passed in rapid review before her, like the figures of a panorama.

Finally she awoke. Was it mockery?—all bitter disappointment that had attended her refreshing

slumber? No, not at all; the sweet breath of the woods was there, and low, soft and melodious the weird and solemn refrain of a harp came to her ears. She started up in partial bewilderment, gazing wildly around her. She bent her head and listened. Nothing save the ravishing strains of music, broke the silence. They seemed to issue from a cluster of bushes along the shore to the left, and, as if unable to overcome the weird fascination of the sound, she turned and moved toward it.

She soon came to a little bay surrounded by a deep fringe of green-foliaged trees, whose boughs overhanging formed an Arcadian bower over the still placid waters of the bay. Upon the bosom of the latter rested a strange-looking craft, resembling the long, narrow roof of a house with gables. A door opened in the side of this roof-like structure, and in front of it sat two persons, an old man and a young girl.

The former sat with his face buried in his hands, apparently absorbed in deep reverie; while the maiden, with snowy fingers flashing over the strings of a Spanish harp, called forth those wild, weird strains of celestial music.

CHAPTER XX.

PALACE OF OLD NEPTUNE.

ENCHANTED by the music and startled by the scene, Maggie Harris stood silent and motionless, listening to the one and studying the other. The player was a young and beautiful girl, possibly not over eighteen years of age. Her rare loveliness, her sylph-like form, her queenly grace, and air of high-born accomplishments contrasted strangely with the surrounding scene. Her eyes were of a soft brown, large and lustrous, and full of tenderness and love. She was robed in a gown of misty blue with a white collar around the snowy neck. Her golden hair hung like silken floss down her back. A tiny, golden clasp at the throat, and a modest little rose in her hair were the only ornaments the fair creature wore. She sat near the old man, her very attitude, the poise of the head, and the manner in which she held her harp, all were positions of exquisite grace and ease.

The man was upward of sixty years of age, and in type and dress the personification of old Neptune. His face, his beard, his hair, and even his trident spear, bore a striking resemblance to those of the God of the Sea. His brow wore the contracted furrows of care and deep thought. By his side lay some mechanical contrivance, consisting of wheels, rods and shafts of copper; and by these sat a kit of tools, such as would only be used by a master mechanical hand.

The craft upon which these two mysterious people were seated was as odd as it was ingenious. It was about twenty feet long by ten in width, and sloped gradually from the water to a point like the comb of a house-roof, though it was plainly evident that some portion of its square was submerged. The whole was plated with galvanized sheet-iron which gave it a white, clouded color. On the top were four small tubes resembling chimneys, though it was not possible that all were used as such. Maggie regarded the strange sight for some time with speechless emotion. She had often heard of Lake Luster and the foreboding solitude that surrounded it; but never had she heard of these people, who had, from all appearances, dwelt there for some time. She scarcely knew whether to consider them friends or foes. There was something in the stern looks of the old man and the desolate repose that surrounded his habitation, that made her doubtful of his character. But, the fair and lovely creature at his side—innocence, womanly love and kindness were written upon every feature of her face; and in the strains that floated out from the harp came the accompaniment of a sweet and holy spirit.

While the fugitive maiden stood undecided as to the course she should pursue, the old man started up, seized his trident and thrust it into the water. A smile overspread his face—a smile that drove away all those hard lines, and relieved the fears of Maggie Harris. As the old man drew back his spear, our heroine saw a large fish impaled upon it, struggling in the grasp of the terrible bars.

Releasing the fish, and securing it from escape, the old man again relapsed into silence, while the maiden continued at the harp. Five minutes, perhaps, had passed, when he again threw his spear and drew in a second fish. While he was releasing it, the maiden ceased playing, and, walking to the old man, said:

"Oh, what a nice fish, father! The two will be ample for our want for a day or two. The poor thing, how it struggles. It seems a pity to kill them, after having enticed them here by the enchantment of music."

"God has placed the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea at our command; and we have only to take them when our needs demand them. A slice of venison, or a roasted fowl, would be a welcome change at our table; but these are perilous times, and the report of a rifle might guide enemies to our retreat."

"Enemies? what enemies have we, father?" questioned the maiden.

"There's no telling; the savages will doubtless regard all whites who do not join their ranks as enemies; and, if so, we will be in danger, for I will never bear arms against my countrymen."

"Why not observe a strict neutrality, father?" "This would be impossible with the red-skins. They have no knowledge, in their savage ignorance, of civilized warfare, and we could not convince them that, as neutrals, we had any rights they were bound to respect."

"Why not quit Lake Luster till peace is restored, father?"

"I could not think of it, Vishnia; especially, while on the eve of success in my invention that must give me fame and wealth through all ages to come."

"But, father, if there is a war between the North and South, the sale of your self-propelling, self-acting torpedo may give you both fame and wealth. Now would be a good time to introduce your invention."

"Not very, daughter. The war between the North and South will not be a naval war. It will be principally on land," the old man replied.

"At any rate, why waste more of your life over a project that you may never achieve, and which has ruined the life and mind of many a wise genius?"

Maggie heard all this conversation, and was not a little surprised. She saw that the old man had secluded himself there to work out in secret the complication of some great invention. She had heard and read of such self-abbatement before, on the part of wise men, for the furtherance of science. But such great sacrifice had been uncalculated for, and was usually attended with an overwrought imagination. In the subdued light of the old man's eyes, his knit brows, and snowy temples, she could see the presence of a partially-clouded mind. His conversation revealed this, and Maggie had resolved not to intrude upon the privacy of his beloved schemes, and was about to turn away when she heard a rustle in the shrubbery to her right. Turning her eyes, she beheld a clump of bushes carefully parted, and a painted savage face appear in the opening.

A cry rose to her lips, and like a deer she darted from her concealment and ran toward the water. She had gone but a few paces, however, when the savage overtook her. He grasped her by the arm and a vested her flight; then he lifted her in his naked, brawny arms and turned to flee. But, before he had taken a dozen steps, something struck him in the back with a dull thud. A gasp escaped his lips, and with a convulsive quiver running through his whole form, he sunk heavily to the earth, falling across the unconscious form of Maggie.

A massive footstep approached from the lake, and the tall form of the mysterious old man of Lake Luster stood by the side of the dead warrior and the helpless maiden. Stooping, he seized the savage's form and hurled him aside, then from the body he withdrew his barbed spear, lifted Maggie in his strong arms and carried her aboard his boat. Scarcely had he done so when a fierce, savage yell burst upon the air, and a score of savages rushed from the woods to avenge their fallen comrade; but, before they could reach the water's edge, the boat was put in motion by some invisible means.

The savages fired at the craft, but their bullets glanced from the metal covering of the structure like hail from a stone wall; and, in a few moments more, it was even beyond rifle-range, out upon the bosom of Lake Luster.

CHAPTER XXI. TRULY INFERNAL.

It was on the night following the events just narrated that we left the Boy Brigade on the shores of Lake Luster, then bathed in the mellow radiance of full moon.

An exclamation of surprise and admiration escaped each lip as they gazed out over the little sheet and its dark-green border of forest trees.

But few of the little party had ever looked upon Lake Luster under similar circumstances. It was a place seldom frequented by hunter or trapper. The deep shadows seemed to have expelled all animal life from within its borders, and it was only by accident that one happened that way.

"By mighty!" exclaimed old Joyful Jim, "if that isn't the most romantic scene I ever clapped my optics on. Why, she burns like a jewel on the black hand of a nigger gal. Lake Luster, did you say, Seth?"

"Yes; the water is almost transparent. In many places you can see the bottom and the fish sporting about; but this is nothing more than may be said of nearly all of Minnesota's thousand and one lakelets. Indian tradition has peopled Lake Luster with spirits of the departed, therefore it has been seldom visited by the living."

"That's good; and I hope they'll continue to observe this absence from the spirit lake while we're here," said Jim. "I've had enuff of hornets' jave-lins and Ingins' bullets to last me till next harvest."

"Wherever our trail leads, they'll be sure to follow, mind what I tell you," said Sure Shot Seth.

"Wharfore?" old Jim demanded.

"They are led by a white man; or rather a white boy, whose youth will be nothing in our favor. Ivan Le Clercq is unprincipled and bad. He has just enough of Indian blood in him to make him bloodthirsty and revengeful; and enough of French to make him subtle in plotting and planning. Yes; in Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, we have a powerful enemy, boys."

"Yis; but, begob, they dassent buck against the Boy Brigade," said Teddy O'Roop.

"Ki, yi, guess de Boy Brigade had all dat dey want at de island last night, whar de angel come and play and diag on de rock!"

"Lovely creature!" exclaimed old Jim; "she saved our bacous, I dare say; and it'd do me good to stand up before her and thank her with all my heart for her kindness. Wasn't she superb, though?"

"You don't think she was a celestial being, do you?" asked Seth, half-smiling.

"Think it?—heavens! I know it. Nothing mortal that wears hair would a'dared to come onto that rock between the muzzles of two-score of deadly rifles."

"She was an entire stranger to me, Jim; but I know she is mortal; and, furthermore, I am inclined to think she is a personage known to and

wielding great power over the red-skins. But, boys, we must find Miss Harris, if living, so let us move on, and—"

At this juncture, Hooseah, the Indian lad, who had been absent from the main party, reconnoitering, came running up in great excitement, and said:

"Bad Ingins—lots—on ahead!"

"Indeed?" exclaimed Seth; "are they watching for us?"

"No—watchin' big wigwam on the lake—see him float out from the shadows."

He pointed out over the lake, and all eyes turning in the direction indicated, beheld a long, triangular structure floating out from the border of shadows that lined the southern shore, into the moonlit waters.

"It's a tent!" exclaimed Mr. Harris.

"It looks like a tent; but it surely isn't one," answered Seth. "It appears to glimmer like a metal shield."

"Dogged if it isn't a little queer," said one of the boys.

"It puzzles me, I assure you," remarked another. "It is moving quite fast, and yet I cannot see from whence it receives its motive power," said Harris.

The craft continued on into the open lake until it had gained the center, when it came to a stand. Then our friends saw a door open on the sloping side and a man appear from the interior. He stood in front of the door and gazed around him. The Brigade could see the outlines of a tall person with long beard and hair. In his hand he held a staff with a trident-spear on the end of it.

From the darkness along the shore a tongue of fire suddenly shot out, and the report of a rifle started the midnight echoes for miles.

"Och! and the bloody Ingins are firing on the stranger," said Teddy.

"Yes; and by that," answered Seth, "we are to understand that the stranger is an enemy of the red-skins, whatever he may be to us."

With an imperious wave of the hand, the old man on the raft turned and entered his boat; but soon he appeared again, bearing something in his arms. Carefully he scanned the surrounding shores, but seeing no one, he sat down and gazed calmly around him.

Our friends stood still on the shore watching his movements, and puzzling their brains as to who he was.

A boat suddenly crept out from the shadows of the east bank and moved toward the strange raft. There were five occupants in it. They were savages, and brightly flashed their paddles as they rose and fell in the water.

The man now rose to his feet, and in deep, thunderous tones warned the red-skins back. But they either did not understand him, or else heeded not his warning. Seeing this, the old fellow got down upon his knees and placed the article that he had brought out with him in the water. Our friends could see that it emitted a very faint glow not much larger than the coruscation of a firefly. No sooner was it placed in the water than it began to move—glided smoothly along the surface of the lake directly toward the red-skins.

"What now, in the name of Sodom, does that mean?" exclaimed old Joyful Jim. "See it, boys!—a little speck of fire creeping along to'rds that Ingins boat!"

All answered in the affirmative.

"What do you opine it are?" he questioned.

None could tell. All were equally puzzled.

"Shouldn't wonder if it weren't some of the devil's own contraptions," said Jim, knowingly.

All relapsed into silence and watched with bated breath and fixed eye the moving speck of fire. The Indians, too, had discovered its approach, and sat holding their paddles in motionless hands, regarding the tiny object with silent attention.

Meanwhile, the old man on the boat stood with folded arms gazing after the moving speck, while a silence as deep and profound as creation's morn hung over all. It was a foreboding stillness.

Straight toward the red-skin's boat, which had not deviated a foot from its course toward the unknown raft, the floating spark made its way. The Indians were deeply puzzled by it, and although their minds were not unmixed with superstition regarding Lake Luster, they affected no fear of the approaching object. It was so very small that no harm could possibly come of it; or, at least, this was the conviction that it forced upon our friends, as well as the red-skins.

A slight commotion agitated the savages as it neared them, and our friends saw the foremost warrior dip his paddle and turn the prow of the boat southward. But for this act, the floating light would have passed them slightly to the right; but the prow of the boat being thrown across its path, it came in contact with the craft, when, horrors! a sheet of flame burst from the boom of the lake under the boat, and a roar like the sudden burst of a volcano shook the night.

High up in the air flew water and fragments of the canoe and the riven forms of its human freight—so high that when the debris came down again an arm and torn hand fell on the shore before their horrified gaze.

CHAPTER XXII.

"SCATTER!"

"My God," was the exclamation of Harris, at sight of the human limb that had been torn from the body by the terrible explosion and thrown on the beach.

"Ay!" exclaimed Joyful Jim; "I told you it was one of the devil's own contraptions. I tell ye, boys,

Satanic majesty is aboard that boat, or else my head's not hot."

"It must have been a torpedo that burst under the boat," Sure Shot Seth remarked.

"Without a doubt," said Harris, "and the light we saw floating out from that boat was, without a doubt, attached to the deadly machine."

"But from whence did it derive its power of propulsion?"

"That I cannot answer; but, I dare say, it is some ingenious mechanical contrivance of the inmate of that boat, whoever he may be," answered Seth.

"But who is the inmate of that craft?"

"That's the question," said Seth; "but an idea is creeping into my head, and I'll wager anything that the angel that came, and sung, and played between the muzzles of your and the savages' guns last night belongs in that little craft."

"Who? Vishnia of the Valley?"

"Yes; she's probably some wild, crazy girl, and the act that saved you on the Rock Island was but a freak of her diseased mind. No sane girl would dare wander alone, of her own free will, through those woods at night, much less perform such a reckless act as to come between the guns of two deadly foes as a peacemaker."

"That's mighty sound doctrine, Sure Pop," said old Jim, thoughtfully, "and I'll go a cookskin that, if she's aboard that craft, crazy as a loon, her father's thar also, crazier'n a March hare."

"Crazy people sometimes perform miraculous—"

Harris was here cut short by a wild, triumphant peal of laughter ringing across the lake from the raft, fully substantiating, and settling in the minds of those who heard, the truth of old Jim's assertion—that the man on the boat was a madman.

By this time nearly every vestige of the terrible explosion had disappeared. The lake had become tranquil; and not a savage was to be seen.

The mysterious boat still occupied its position on the lake, and its occupant his position upon its deck. But soon, the latter retired from view, and silent and grim the craft lay upon the placid bosom of the glimmering sheet.

While Seth and his companions stood discussing the tragedy, the sound of footsteps was heard approaching. This enjoined silence upon them; but the footsteps turned and retreated. That they were made by savage feet the Brigade had not a doubt, and that they had not been discovered was also quite evident.

Scarcely five minutes had elapsed when the rush of a hundred feet was heard along the shore. A horde of savages were stealing upon the Brigade.

"Whirr-rr-rr-rr-rr-rr," suddenly rose from the midst of the Brigade, like the "whirr" of a pheasant in a copse.

Instantly, almost, the whole of the little band scattered in every direction like a flock of sheep. The savages uttered a yell, and sent a volley into the darkness after them, but not a bullet took effect.

The footsteps of the Brigade fleeing in every direction confused the red-skins, so that pursuit was baffled for some time. This gave our friends an opportunity to make good their escape. It was a part of their tactics under such circumstances. The "whirr" issued by Sure Shot Seth's lips was well understood; it was a signal to disperse.

Away through the darkness of the grim Black Woods the Brigade fled. Seth took Mr. Harris with him, while Joyful Jim and Tom Grayson, who had been admitted to the membership in the band, sought safety as did the rest.

In ten minutes' time a deep and profound silence reigned over the forest and lake. The red-skins made no attempt to follow the boys far. They knew the danger of scattering in pursuit.

Out in the wood, under the deep shadows of a great tree, Sure Shot Seth and Maggie's father came to a halt, and listened.

"We have escaped," said the latter; "but who knows the fate of the others?"

"Rest assured they are safe," was Seth's confident reply.

"But they are all scattered like a covey of quails. I daresay we are the only two that stuck together."

"That's the idea, exactly. We take the quail for our example. A peculiar 'whirr' of the leader's wings disperses them, and, rest assured, each quail will remain concealed until the leader calls, when it will come out and answer. If all, as applied to the Boy Brigade, do not answer, I repeat the call; and if some are still silent, it is to be taken for granted that danger lurks near the ones not answering."

"But suppose one of your band should be killed?"

"We have made no provision for such a mishap, for we don't intend to get killed."

"The Boy Brigade is a splendid organization," said Harris, "and if it can find my child, I will be under eternal obligations to it."

"We will leave nothing undone to find her, Mr. Harris. She may have fallen into the red-skins' power, or she may have grown tired waiting my return, and fled. We have only to be patient and constant in our search."

The father sighed heavily.

Half an hour went by in silence.

Not one word nor sound of the others had been heard.

Presently Seth rose to his feet and said:

"I shall now ascertain where the rest of the boys are."

He uttered a clear, startling whistle, not unlike that of a night-bird peculiar to the northern woods. The sound drifted away through the night and died in the distance.

The hoot of an owl came back in response.

"Ay!" exclaimed Seth; "the Owl is safe. Did you not hear his answer, Mr. Harris?"

"Was that one of the boys?"

"It was; but listen."

One after the other came the respective answers of each of the Boy Brigade.

"Every one of them is safe," said Seth, "and, in the course of half an hour, I will call them up as a hen calleth her brood."

They remained silent for some time, when Seth sent forth the hoot of an owl. It was answered from the north, and a few moments later young Schultz, The Owl, made his appearance. Then followed the hoot of the wolf, and Le Subtle Wolf, the Indian lad, appeared. Thus one call after another was made, until the whole band was together, though no two calls were made in the same place, through fear that an enemy might gain the location.

Once more together, a short consultation was held, which developed the fact that the Black Woods were then swarming with Indians. Justin Gray reported that, while he was in concealment, a number of Indians passed him carrying two canoes in the direction of Lake Luster. As there were a number of small lakes on the outskirts of the Black Woods noted for their inexhaustible supply of fish and fishing boats, it was very evident that the Indians were not going to be defeated in the capture of the stranger on Lake Luster, and were carrying boats to the latter point for the purpose of attacking the enemy, despite the recent horrible fate of their companions.

Their persistent efforts to capture the raft were, as our friends well know, led by the Boy Chief; and the trained mind of Sure Shot Seth quickly concluded that, in this movement of the enemy, there was something or some one aboard that raft which they desired to possess or slay. Might it not be Maggie Harris? Might she not have wandered from where he had left her to the lake, and been taken aboard the madman's raft?

The stunning report of a rifle, coming from the direction of the lake, put an end to his cogitations.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GAME WELL PLAYED.

SURE SHOT SETH made known his convictions, and, at his suggestion, the party returned to the lake.

The shadows, by this time were lengthening on the western side of the little sheet; but they had not reached the raft, which still sat motionless on the water, and to all appearance unharmed.

Hooseah, the Indian lad, was at once sent out to reconnoiter the western shore, while Seth went himself to scout along the eastern side of the lake. It was their desire to know what the Indians were about, and their exact location, as well as their numerical strength.

Seth kept back about two rods from the margin of the lake and moved rapidly, yet noiselessly as a phantom. He had gained the northern end of the lake without hearing or seeing anything of the redskins; but, as he rounded the shore toward the west, he heard a sound that told of the close proximity of enemies. He paused and listened, then with every faculty on the alert, he crept on closer and closer to the foe, stopping every now and then to listen. He at length found himself at the water's very edge in a clump of bushes, whose drooping foliage trailed itself in the water. Before him was a narrow opening or path, beyond which was another border of dense shrubbery. He was just about to step across this path when he heard light footsteps coming along toward the lake. Remaining quiet, he awaited the approach. A young chief, dressed in all the gaudy panoply of war, brushed past him and stopped on the margin of the lake.

It was Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief, Ivan Le Clercq!

Seth could scarcely restrain the terrible emotion that ran in his breast on making this discovery. His hand mechanically sought the weapon at his girdle; but his better judgment prevailed, and he remained as silent as if frozen to the spot, his eyes fixed upon the young chief.

The young renegade ran his eyes over the lake. Seth was so close to him that he could see a strange smile of delight pass over his countenance at sight of something on the water. What it was that pleased him Seth knew not, nor dare he even move his head to ascertain.

The chief kept his eyes out upon the lake until his attention was diverted by footsteps behind. He turned and saw a young warrior approaching.

"What does Hawk-Eyes see?" asked the latter.

"Sh!" cautioned the chief; "look yonder."

The warrior did as directed, when a low, sinister smile of triumph shot athwart his dusky, painted face.

The next moment a succession of tiny waves began chafing the shore at their feet and the dip of a paddle became audible. The chief and his companion stepped back into the shadows. This movement left Seth under less restraint.

"Ah! the cunning, cowardly wretches," thought Seth, drawing his revolver, "they are preparing to pounce upon some unsuspecting victim. But I'll see about it."

The next moment a small canoe with a single occupant couched the bank where the path ended; and that occupant was a female—a young and lovely girl—the fairy-like Vishnia, the maid of the Valley.

As she rose to her feet the chief advanced and confronted her. She started with a little cry of alarm, but soon recovered her composure and addressed the Indian.

"Whom have I the pleasure of meeting?"

"Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief," answered the young renegade.

"Does he lead the Indians that surround Lake Luster?"

"He does," was the answer.

"Then with him I came to negotiate terms of peace."

She stood erect in her rubber canoe as she spoke. The tones of her voice were soft and child-like in their melody. Through the foliage that concealed his person, Sure Shot Seth could see the symmetry of her profile clearly outlined against the moonlit water. A thin shawl enveloped her slender figure. A light straw hat was pushed back from her head till it rested on her back, thus revealing wondrous features. All the power of love, innocence and purity combined in woman radiated from the soul of this fair being; and Seth felt its power as sensibly as though under some mesmeric influence. But it was quite evident to Seth that the sweet and holy presence of the girl made no impression on the better nature of Ivan Le Clercq. His heart was dead to all the nobler emotions of the human heart. A look of impudence mounted his face. Even his savage companion was possessed of more of the true inwardness of manhood, for a look of admiration overspread his features.

"What does the white maiden want with the Boy Chief?" the young renegade asked, his tone and looks devoid of the first principles of courtesy.

"To effect terms of peace."

"How? By blowing my braves into eternity?"

"No," replied the maiden, "we do not wish to do violence; but your warriors would not heed the counsel of my father. But a repetition of the horrible deed can be prevented by a proper understanding. My father takes no part in this war. He is neutral and desires to remain so; and had it been a party of whites instead of Indians going to attack him, he would have blown them out of the water all the same."

"What is your father?—what's he doing on the lake in that craft?" questioned Hawk-Eyes.

"Nothing dishonorable," she answered, evasively.

"That's not a very square answer," was the rude response.

"It is all that I feel at liberty to give," the maiden said, fear manifest in her voice.

"Well, let me hear what propositions for peace you have to make," the renegade observed.

"Nothing more than the request that you withdraw your designs against our home yonder, on the lake, and no harm shall befall a red-man, so far as we are concerned," was the maiden's response.

"We fear nothing, nor any one," was the brutal reply of the Boy Chief. "The woods and the lakes belong to the red-man, and it is not for the whites to make conditions regarding them."

"I know the Indians are not cowards, and I do not wish to intimidate them. I only ask what is honorable."

"What is your father's name?"

"Neptune," she answered; but Le Clercq's ignorance of mythology concealed the evasion in her answer.

"Neptune," he repeated; "well, I will accede to your demands on one condition."

"I will be pleased to hear what your wish may be."

"Well, there's a young girl aboard your boat, isn't there?"

Vishnia started, and hesitated for a moment to reply; but finally she said:

"I have no desire to answer falsely: there is a young girl there—Miss Harris."

Seth's heart gave a great bound. He was afraid that it would betray his presence. Maggie was safe, and that was joy to him. He felt so thankful that he could have kissed the garments of her who brought the glad intelligence. But his feelings assumed a different mood when he heard the young chief say:

"Deliver that maiden into my power and you and yours shall be molested no more by the Indians."

"But that would be against her will," said Vishnia.

"I dare say it would; but no difference about that."

"I would not consent to do a wrong, for if you would hold her a captive against her will, it would be cruel and barbarous," said the maiden.

"The Indians are classed as barbarians," Le Clercq replied; "so it wouldn't make any material difference."

"Father will never consent to give her up to her enemies."

"But I will make him give her up."

"Do not overestimate your power, young chief."

"I'll see to that. I'll just hold you in hostage till that girl is given up."

Vishnia started, and her face grew pale with fear. This was something she had not expected, and she saw little chance of escape from her situation.

"I have always heard that the Indians were possessed of gallantry, and under such circumstances would treat a woman kindly," said Vishnia; "but had I known otherwise, I would never have placed myself at your mercy."

"I am sorry to disappoint you, but the exigency of this case demands that I hold you a prisoner till Maggie Harris is given up. Black Dog"—turning to the Indian—"you will take the pale-face girl to our camp."

Half reluctantly, the Indian advanced toward the maiden, who, seating herself, attempted to flee. But the Indian was too quick for her. He caught her canoe and dragged it half upon the shore; but, before he had time to contaminate her by his touch, Sure Shot Seth saw the bushes on the opposite side of the path move, and the next instant a tomahawk, wielded by some unseen person there, fell upon the head of the savage. Like a log, he went down lifeless, falling partly in the water. Hawk-Eyes started back, aghast with fear and horror. He heard the click of a revolver on his left, and the

next moment the weapon itself was thrust through the foliage into his very face. But not a word was spoken—not a face was visible to the half-terrified young chief. He fixed his glaring eyes upon the weapon, and ran them along the arm thrust from the bushes; but he could not tell by whom he was confronted. That it was an enemy with a cool head and steady nerve, however, he had no doubt. Had he known that he stood at the muzzle of Sure Shot Seth's revolver, his terror would have been still greater; but Seth did not want him to know it, and so kept still and hidden in the bushes.

For fully a minute the young chief stood wincing before the weapon thrust at him like the finger of death; but, seeing the unknown enemy hesitated to fire, he gathered courage, struck up the muzzle of the weapon, then turned and darted into the darkness.

Then Seth parted the bushes and stepped out into the moonlight on one side of the path, and Hooseah, the Indian lad, appeared from the other.

"Me kill Sioux brave; why Sure Shot no kill Hawk-Eyes!" asked the young friendly, a look of sore regret on his face.

"I would not fire through fear of bringing danger upon her," replied Seth, pointing toward the little canoe leaping across the water under the vigorous strokes of the fair Vishnia's paddle.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CLOSE QUARTERS INDEED.

VISHNIA waited not to learn whom her rescuers were, but wild with fear, she pushed off from the beach and sped toward the stronghold of her father upon the lake. But, after she had had a few moments for thought, and her mind had become somewhat composed, she felt a pang of regret for having acted so hastily in leaving her unknown friends without a word of thanks, after they had saved her. To remedy this, however, was now too late; and she was to remain in ignorance, for the time being, as to the persons who had befriended her.

Seth and Hooseah felt in no way aggrieved by the course she had pursued. In fact, it was just what they wanted, for no sooner was Hawk-Eyes free than he gave the alarm that brought a horde of the savages yelling to the water's edge. But, all they found was a comrade lying dead, his head cloven by a tomahawk.

The two scouts at once beat a hasty retreat along the shore back toward their friends, whom they found in a fever of excitement and anxiety. Seth lost no time in communicating to Harris the discovery he had made respecting Maggie.

"Good Lord bless you, boy!" the happy father exclaimed, wringing Seth's hand. "It relieves my heart of an awful load to know that my child lives; but now, another fear rises in my mind—the fear that the madman on that craft may do her violence."

"Rest easy on that point, Mr. Harris," said Seth, "for I assure you no harm can befall her there; for she has for a companion as fair and lovely a girl as the sun ever shone upon. I heard her refuse to give Maggie to the savages to insure her own and her father's safety. No; Maggie is safe; but the mystery surrounding that raft has deeply enlisted my interest."

"Then you don't think the folks on that consarn are crazy, do you, now?" asked Joyful Jim.

"Far from it; for if the rest are to be judged by that maiden whom Hooseah tells me is Vishnia, the Maid of the Valley—she who rescued you at Rock Island, then they are superior beings. By keeping in the vicinity of the lake we may be enabled to unravel this mystery. It is true, our assistance may be needed at the Agency; but if by remaining here we can hold a score or two of Indians away from there, we will be rendering them a great service; so suppose we now seek some safe quarters and rest easy till morning?"

"Nuff said," exclaimed old Jim, "for I'm 'bout bumfusticated."

All readily acquiesced in Seth's suggestion, when the party at once moved a mile southward and bivouacked on the margin of the Black Woods. Here they passed the night, and with the first streaks of dawn they were astir. Hooseah brained a deer with his tomahawk, shortly after daylight, which furnished a hearty breakfast and an ample supply of food for the needs of the day.

Regaled by their brief sleep, and their meal of savory venison, the Boy Brigade felt vigorous, and anxious for the day's excitement to begin.

Hooseah and young Tricks being deployed as scouts, the party started back toward the lake. They had proceeded but a short distance when firing was heard in advance, and the peculiar war-cry of Le Subtle Wolf warned the Brigade that danger was very near.

In a moment every man and boy sought shelter, and the dozen red-skins in pursuit of Hooseah found themselves in an ambuscade of deadly enemies as they were aware. A short, but desperate conflict ensued. The red-skins were routed, and but for the dense shadows of the Black Woods, not a man of them would have escaped.

Fierce and terrible the war-cry of the Boy Brigade was hurled after the foe, and wild and diabolical came the response from the enemy.

The Brigade pressed on toward the lake, and at length came in sight of it. The first thing that met their view was the floating cabin of old Neptune. Smoke was curling from one of the little chimney-like boxes on the roof. The door opened, and all saw a little female figure, with a vessel in her hand, trip out upon the porch or platform in front, and dip some water from the lake, then re-enter the building.

"That was the fair Vishnia," said Seth.

"Do'n' up the housework," added Joyful Jim, with a strange smile.

"And youder," said Mr. Harris, "you can see a horde of Indians preparing to embark in canoes from the east shore; and, I dare say, they have designs upon the palace of old Neptune. Boys, can't we drive them away?"

"Neptune will defend himself, I'll guarantee," said Justin Gray. "I'll venture the assertion that he's surrounded with torpedoes."

Gaining a point where they could command a full view of the savages, the boys watched their operations with no little interest. And it was soon discovered that, in addition to the four canoes which they had brought to Lake Luster during the night, a huge raft of logs was in course of construction. No less than a dozen logs were in the water already, lying at right-angles with the shore, and about three feet apart. Across the ends of these, a long pine stick of timber was placed and firmly lashed to each cross-piece. Another log, but smaller in size, was lashed across the other ends of the under logs, and then the raft seemed to have been completed. Between every two logs, two savages took their position, their bodies submerged in the water and their heads and shoulders concealed behind the large log lashed across the ends of the others.

It was rather a rude, yet effectual raft for the purpose intended, and our friends watched the preparations for the attack upon Neptune with no little fear and doubt.

"If they succeed in getting within easy gunshot of Neptune's raft, I am afraid they will be successful in their attempts," said Sure Shot. "However, we will walk around that way and perhaps we'll get an opportunity to take the red rascals in the rear."

"And perhaps Niptoon," said old Jim, "will bring another of them double-gereed, volcano contraphins to mince the varlets into fish-bait."

"I hope so," said Harris, "but it seems as though the devils were bound to have my poor child."

"Ah, there goes the raft!" exclaimed young Gray.

True enough, the savages remaining on shore had pushed the raft away from the bank, and slowly and heavily the cumbersome affair drifted out, propelled by the feet of those in the water.

"Now, boys," said Seth, "let us hurry around there and do our best for our friends on the lake."

Away they glided like so many shadows and soon came within range of the Indians watching upon the bank. Without a moment's delay they opened a deadly fire upon them. The savages at once sought shelter; but in such a position as to cover the operations of their friends on the lake.

Harris kept by the side of the fearless young borderman, Sure Shot Seth. And it was with a feeling of the deepest agony that he learned of their inability to prevent the advance of the raft upon the structure that sheltered his child.

The Boy Brigade was now in its element again. Concealed behind trees, logs and bushes, the fearless youths watched with eager, burning eyes for a glimpse of an enemy. They fought the Indians as Indians fight; and as the red-skins were laboring under the excitement of a surprise, they appeared restless and impatient, and kept dodging hither and thither like rats, exposing themselves to view; and whenever the clear report of a rifle, fired by one of the boys, stung through the morning air, a death-yell was sure to follow.

Sure Shot and Harris were where they could command a view of both the Indians' raft and the floating cabin of old Neptune. They saw the latter come out on the porch or platform of his domicile, stoop over and place something in the water, as on the previous night.

"Now look out!" exclaimed Seth; "it's my opinion you'll hear something 'drop.' That man has sent another of his infernal machines to intercept them savages."

A savage around the lake fired at the old man, but his bullet struck the water several rods short of his mark, skimming along the surface and sunk near the floating cabin. A derisive laugh rang from the lips of the intended victim.

About this time a canoe containing a number of warriors put out from the northern shore; but they approached the raft in a rather cautious manner, their eyes searching every foot of the crystal depths before them.

Seth and Harris watched the raft closely for some minutes. Slowly and heavily it crept on through the water.

At times it seemed to stand still, and the patience of the watchers became sorely pressed; but at length they saw the log that protected the savages shoot suddenly into the air, followed by a perfect mountain of water. Then athwart the morning burst an awful, pent-up roar that fairly shook the earth. A perfect maelstrom appeared to engulf raft and savages. The waters of Lake Luster endeavored to leap from their bed, but fell back with a thunderous surge. Wave after wave rolled with a sullen crash against the shore, and recoiled with a rushing, seething roar. Both savages and raft were lost in the rush of waters; but when the water began to calm down, several of the dusky wretches were seen buffeting the waves in desperate attempts to reach the shore. Those that had started out in the canoes with the ostensible purpose of co-operating with the raft, tacked about and beat a hasty retreat.

Old Neptune stood in front of his floating cabin and regarded the whole with remarkable indifference; and as soon as the savages had all disappeared, two female figures issued from the cabin and stood by his side.

An exclamation of joy burst from the lips of Mr. Harris, for he saw that one of them was his own lost child, Maggie. Seth's heart, too, gave a great bound, but he kept back the words of joy and love that rose to his lips.

For a moment the father and lover watched the figures on the cabin porch, but suddenly the crash of rifles drew their attention aside, and when they looked out upon the lake again, the three forms had disappeared inside their defense.

Rendered furious by their defeat upon the lake, the savages massed their forces and turned against their persistent foe, the Boy Brigade. A sharp and vigorous firing was opened, though with what result neither party was enabled to determine, for the shadows of the Black Woods were deep, almost, as a subdued twilight. It soon became evident, however, that the Indians were gradually working in behind the Brigade, with the intention of surrounding it, and Sure Shot Seth, seeing their danger, at once gave the sound for the Brigade to scatter and seek safety in flight.

Instantly, almost, he saw his friends gliding away; and taking the lead, he and Mr. Harris fled also. They started south, but had proceeded only a short distance when, to their surprise and horror, they beheld a dozen savages coming directly toward them. To their left the woods were now swarming with the foe, apparently intent upon the capture of Sure Shot Seth. Behind, the latter knew, the way was cut off, while the lake on the right completed the circle of danger menacing them.

They stopped and glanced around them.

"What will we do?—where shall we go?" asked Harris.

Seth glanced out upon the lake. A few yards from the shore he beheld a large log—one of the timbers of the savages' raft—floating on the water. Its presence seemed to suggest an idea to the youth, who, requesting his companion to follow, started toward the lake.

"Secure your rifle and swim for that log, Harris," the young rifleman cried, as they approached the shore.

Instantly their weapons were secured, and plunging into the water they swam like beavers for the log in question. The savages, with frightful yells, came rushing toward the shore, and several of them succeeded in getting a shot at the fugitives; but they acted with such haste and excitement that no injury was sustained by the whites.

In a few minutes more the latter had got in behind the log, enough of which was above the water to afford ample protection to their heads from Indian bullets. Still, they were in no way beyond danger. The savages could easily swim out to them, as they were not over a hundred yards from shore, and moving quite slow.

"We must widen the distance between us and the shore, Mr. Harris," Seth said; "lay your hands upon the log, kick against the water, and let us swim and pull the log after us. It's our only salvation."

"But we are between two fires," said Harris. "Suppose the man on the raft sends one of his infernal machines down upon us?"

"I apprehend no danger from that source. He was standing on his cabin porch when we entered the lake; and I think he will see the situation at once, and, knowing we are enemies to the savages, will render us assistance. At any rate, I believe we had better attempt to reach the floating cabin."

"Just as you say, Seth," answered Harris. They at once set the log in motion by swimming along backward and pulling it after them; and when fully under headway it required but little effort to keep moving.

Seth thrust his head up over the log and saw that not less than three-score of Indians had assembled on the beach; he saw that great excitement prevailed among them; and, at length, he saw a number, stripped to the waist, plunge into the water and swim toward them.

"Now, Harris, we must work," said Seth; "a number of the red demons are swimming rapidly toward us. If we only dare get from behind this log, we could swim as fast as they; but—"

The clear, stinging report of a rifle rung out behind them, cutting short the youth's words. Glancing back over their shoulders they beheld old Neptune standing in front of his cabin with a rifle in his hand. Mr. Harris turned pale, while a look of uneasiness clouded the face of our hero. A shiver ran over the forms of each as they saw the mysterious old man raise his weapon and aim it directly toward them. A puff of smoke was seen, then the report stung through the air.

Our friends both "ducked" their heads, for they heard the bullet whistle close to their ears; but the horrible shriek of agony that went up from the red-skin's lips told who the object of the old man's vengeance had been.

Seth again ventured to peer over the log toward the shore. He saw one of the warriors who had started after them, struggling in his death throes in the water.

The savages on shore saw the young rifleman raise his head, and almost instantly a shower of bullets converged in a focus about where his face disappeared behind the log. Some of them splattered against the log, some chipped the bark, and others whistled over within two inches of his head. Sure Shot, however, had been enabled to see that the savages swimming after them were not over fifty yards away.

The fugitives redoubled their efforts to escape, now that they felt encouraged by the attempt of old Neptune to come to their assistance. The reports of his rifle now followed each other in such rapid succession that they were convinced he possessed a repeater, but when a double report finally pealed out,

Seth turned and glanced toward the cabin to see who this second defender was. To his surprise he beheld the form of the lovely Vishnia, standing by her father's side, calmly reloading a rifle whose barrel glistened in the sunshine like polished silver.

"Ah, friend Harris!" exclaimed Seth, "we have another friend in the old hermit's daughter."

"We need all the friends we can get now, Sure Shot!" said Harris, "for I am inclined to think we are in a narrow strait, or will be if the enemy overtake us in this water."

"Yes, we are, by heavens!" cried the young borderman, glancing over their defense, "for here comes two logs, one behind the other, and both parallel with our own; and, I dare say, a dozen savages are behind each. If we are overtaken, it will be all day with us."

"Work, men, work for your lives!" came a deep-toned voice from the cabin on the lake—the voice of old Neptune.

"Would to heaven he could get one of his infernal machines down against them logs," said Harris.

"Our log would intercept it," said Seth, "and the red demons know it well enough."

"Yoop! yoop! stiffen yer sinners, boys! Brace up, for here comes ole Joyful Jim to the rescue! Scat, ye red sulphurians, or another volcano will bu'st in yer midst!"

The fugitives bent their eyes to the left and saw the old trader, Joyful Jim, coming rapidly toward them in a canoe. The Indians had opened fire upon him, with the hope of frightening him back, but all to no purpose, for their bullets fell wide of the mark.

At the same instant, however, a deafening yell came from the northern shore of the lake. Six Indians had embarked in a canoe from that point, and each being provided with a paddle, they bid fair to get between the cabin and our two friends in the water.

Old Jim saw the danger and pulled with all his might for his friends, finally reaching them. He succeeded in getting them aboard, then turned toward the cabin of old Neptune. But, to their surprise and horror, they saw that the Indian canoe was standing directly between—

"Gosh annihilate the lop'n' devils! they've squared their fester'n' karkasses atwixt us and that cabin, and so we'll have to skin out for other quarters."

He turned and pulled toward the south shore. Seth took up old Jim's gun and opened fire on the savages in the canoe. Firing from the cabin had ceased, and both the old man and his daughter had sought the cover of their domicile.

For some reason or other, the savages in the canoe made no attempt to follow; and as soon as the latter discovered this, they came to a halt to watch the movements of the enemy.

The red-skins behind the logs soon came up to the canoe. A short conference was held, when all headed for the cabin of old Neptune.

"Now, by the great horned frogs!" exclaimed Jim, "I s'pose you see what's in their mullet heads. I reckon as what you perceive what 'em rare flowers of Satan's propagation are gorin' to do, don't ye? Great walls of he tempests how I do wish a torpedo 'd bu'st under that canoe and spatter them red-skins all over the northern sky. Hoot! by jings! they're gorin' to have to fight for the cabin; the old man's opened his b' thery on the sweet-scented larkspurs."

True enough, old Neptune had opened a vigorous firing upon the red-skins from loopholes in the side of his cabin. Two or three of those in the canoe tumbled lifeless in the lake, while the remainder sought safety behind the advancing logs.

"Boys," said Seth, "we must not desert our unknown friends in the cabin."

"No; to be sure we must not," said Jim, turning the canoe.

Seth and Harris's rifles had been rendered useless by their long submersion, but the former took old Jim's rifle and opened a slow, but destructive fire upon the heads behind the moving logs. But the red-skins seemed determined in their efforts to capture the cabin of the old hermit of the lake. They pushed on—they soon came alongside the cabin. Then they swarmed up out of the water upon the platform in front of the door and upon the roof. The blows of tomahawks, the crash of rifles, the yells of vengeance and groans of agony mingled in a horrible din.

Old Jim pressed as close as he dare—so close that he was enabled to use his revolver. The savages, stripped of every garment save their loin-cloths, climbed and wriggled up the steep, smooth inclination of the cabin, like huge maggots, then slipping and tumbling back—some dead, some wounded, some unhurt—plunged into the water.

Puffs of smoke burst from the side of the cabin, followed by stunning reports. Streaks of blood ran down the side of the building and stained the crystal waters of the lake. But like so many ravenous wolves upon a helpless, wounded deer, the savages fought for admittance and the blood of the old man within.

But, suddenly, a wild cry of horror burst from every lip, and the savages sprung away from the cabin as if stung by scorpions.

Our three friends saw the cabin of old Neptune reel upon the water like a drunken thing, then to their amazement and horror saw it sink beneath the waves of Lake Luster with its helpless, imprisoned inmates!

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FACE BENEATH THE WATERS.

A GROAN burst from the lips of Sure Shot Seth and old Jim, while a wail of the most heart-rending agony escaped the lips of the settler, Mr. Harris, when

they saw the cabin that contained their friends go down in the lake.

"Oh, my poor child! my poor child!" cried the bereaved father, starting up as if to leap in the water.

"May Heaven smite their destroyers with its most terrible vengeance!" moaned Seth, sick at heart.

"Can't we help them?" cried Harris; "can we not—"

"No, Harris," said old Jim, "we can do 'em no good. See, the red demons are 'bout to turn 'rds us. We must flee from, instead of going closer to, the fiends."

True enough; the savages, satisfied of having destroyed the cabin of old Neptune and its inmates, turned toward our three friends in the boat, flushed with their recent victory. A number of them had entered their canoe, while the rest, getting hold of the logs that had afforded them a bulwark in coming over, pushed out for Sure Shot Seth and his friends.

Old Jim dipped the paddle and set the canoe in motion. Seth continued to load and fire upon the red-skins; while Harris, with a look of the deepest agony upon his face, watched the spot where the cabin had gone down, and from whence the waves were still circling outward, and hundreds of bubbles were boiling and surging up.

Every vestige of the cabin had disappeared beneath the lake save the four chimney tops; and of these, but a few inches were visible above the waves. There was no possible hope for the inmates of the cabin; and, sick and sorrowing at heart, Harris turned his back upon the grave of his child.

Old Jim sat silently plying the paddle, a strange smile—half-bitterness, half-joy—resting upon his face. They moved toward the southern shore, pursued by the savages. The latter, however, relinquished their chase as soon as they came in gun-shot of the beach, for the rest of the Boy Brigade was there in sight, ready to cover the landing of their friends.

The red-skins withdrew to the eastern shore, and in a few minutes Lake Luster was deserted of every semblance of life. Even its shores seemed resigned to solitude.

Under cover of a clump of trees the Boy Brigade held a council, their hearts overshadowed by the disaster on the lake.

"Why stay here now," said Justin Gray, "since we can be of no avail to the inmates of the floating cabin?"

"We owe the dead as well as the livin' a duty," said old Jim, thoughtfully, yet with a strange smile upon his face.

"Yes, it is a duty—a Christian duty we owe the dead to give them a Christian burial," declared Sure Shot Seth.

Mr. Harris bowed his head and wept, too full of grief for utterance.

And so it was decided that they remain by the lake until the bodies could be rescued from their confinement, and interred.

Seth and Harris hastened to put their guns in condition for use, for an attack from the red-skins was momentarily expected. Fortunately, however, they were disappointed. Not a red-skin was seen during the day; but that they were about, and busily engaged in concocting some trap to catch their enemies, the Brigade had not a single doubt; and so never permitted their vigilance to relax for a moment.

To remain inactive, however, was a persecution in itself to the little band of bordermen; and as the hours wore heavily on, propositions for some movement were presented by various persons. All were decided in the negative until Seth announced an adventure that would admit of no discussion; he proposed to go, himself, upon the lake, and examine the situation of the sunken cabin, leaving his friends ashore to cover his movements, should the savages make any demonstration against him.

No one could see any material danger in this, and so the young rifleman at once embarked in the canoe, still in their possession, for the scene of death. He used the paddle with remarkable skill, and sent the craft flying over the water. He was guided toward the right spot by the four square chimney-tops protruding above the water. The surface of the lake was smooth and tranquil, and shone like polished silver under the oblique rays of the declining sun.

As the youth neared the spot where the craft went down, his heart almost ceased to beat, while a sense of indescribable horror stole over him. He realized more fully the bitterness of his heart's crushed hopes—the sad awakening of love's young dream. Nerving up, however, he paddled softly on toward the four chimneys—now the monument to his sweet-heart's watery grave.

He soon came within five feet of the chimneys, when he ceased paddling and permitted his boat to come to a rest. He gazed over the side of his craft into the water. Its liquid depths were clear as crystal. He could see the bottom of the lake, and the lower edge of the sunken cabin. He turned and looked over the other side of his boat. He started back with a cry of horror. Beneath him lay the cabin. There was a small glass window or skylight in the roof, and at this window, her hands clutched hold of the lower sill, her white, ghastly face uplifted with all the expression of terror that death could stamp thereon, he beheld Maggie Harris, standing erect, rigid and motionless.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SURE SHOT CAUGHT AT LAST.

"Oh, Heaven!" burst from the youth's lips, as he beheld the face of his dead darling at the window of the sunken cabin. He turned his eyes away, unable

to look upon the ghastly scene. But, he could not drive from his mind the ghastly face, the eyes that were staring wide open; the flowing locks of hair; and the look of despair that he had seen at the window.

For a moment or two he sat motionless, paralyzed. A shrill, quivering whistle rung upon his ear. He started—he recognized it as the warning of danger that belonged to the Boy Brigade's code of signals. He glanced around him, and, to his surprise and fear, beheld three canoes, loaded with savages, put out from different points around the lake and move rapidly toward him. Taking up his paddle he headed toward his friends, while two of the canoes bent their course to cut him off from shore. This, Seth knew, they would almost accomplish, considering their advantages, were it not for his friends, who would leave nothing undone to cover his retreat. But, scarcely had he considered this self-assuring fact, ere the report of firearms, mingled with yells and shouts, came from the direction in which he was going, telling him that the enemy had attacked the Brigade and that he could look for no succor from that quarter.

What had promised a quiet, uninterrupted visit to the grave of his sweetheart, now threatened to be a dangerous adventure. With no one to keep the Indians back, he could not reach a landing-place before they came in rifle range. He knew by the rapid firing, and the fierce, savage yells in the woods, that his friends were being sorely pressed; and, as he had to depend wholly upon his own exertions for safety, he turned his boat and attempted to escape between the canoe to the south and that to the east of him. He worked as he never worked before. The perspiration poured from his face; the blood leaped in hot currents through his veins; and his nerves seemed strung to nerves of steel. The elastic blade in his hands bent like a bow; the canoe fairly leaped under each powerful stroke, and a white, frothy streak across the lake defined the wake of the boat.

For awhile, strong hope of escape encouraged the young rifleman in his almost superhuman efforts; but, in an instant, all was dashed to the earth, the paddle fell from his hands, and he sunk half lifeless in the canoe, a stream of hot blood spurting from his nostrils. Nature had been overdone. An artery had been ruptured, and what of life the hemorrhage left, was now in possession of his implacable foe, Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief.

Weak and still bleeding, Sure Shot Seth was taken by the savages and conveyed ashore and out into the woods into the midst of a large band of young warriors.

A yell of triumph hailed the captors' arrival, and a general rush to see the captive followed.

Seth was permitted to sit down, and holding his extended arms above his head succeeded in stopping the flow of blood from his nose. He was literally covered with his own crimson life-tide.

The savages respected his misfortune so far as an Indian can respect a wounded enemy. No indignities were visited upon him; but many, fierce and vindictive, were their threats.

Seth ran his eyes over the faces of his captors for that of the Boy Chief; but it was nowhere to be seen. Presently, however, that young renegade made his appearance with a number of others from around the lake. As he pressed through the crowd of savages surrounding Seth, a cry of abject fear burst from his lips when he caught sight of the prisoner. He started back, at first, as if from the presence of one he feared, but quickly recovering and concealing all trepidation from his braves, he advanced to where our hero sat.

"Sure Shot Seth," he said, half to himself. Seth raised his eyes, while a cry of surprise burst from the red-skin's lip.

"Who are you that knows me?" demanded Seth, "and speaks English so well?"

"We met last on the morning of the shooting-match at the Agency," was the chief's response.

Seth knew it, but pretended ignorance.

"I have no recollection of you," he answered.

"Well, you will know me when you see me again, I assure you."

"Ah, that's a threat," Seth replied, with disdain. "None but a coward would mock and threaten a prisoner."

"You are my prisoner—you, the leader of a band under whose rifles scores of my braves have fallen," returned the chief.

"It has been a fair, free fight. You have the odds, and if you get whipped, you have no reason to complain," returned the fearless boy rifleman.

"Then if you get scalped and roasted, I suppose you'll have no reason to complain?"

"Of nothing more than that it was done at the instance of a cowardly knave—a white red-skin, whose name is Ivan Le Clercq," said Seth, contemptuously, "and who, with Benedict Arnold and Judas Iscariot, will go down to posterity in history base and traitor."

"But the historian will never know the fate of Sure Shot Seth, he who played it well the day of the shooting-match; but I wasn't asleep."

"Coward! you believed me dead till you met me here, a minute ago; and fearing the vengeance of the law, you fled—deserted your own people and endeavored to coax your four white friends away with you; and for all I know succeeded, after having sneakily murdered Abe Thorne. You are a vile wretch—too vile even for an Indian."

The Boy Chief started as if thunderstruck at these words; but he saw that his manifestations of fear brought looks of derision and disgust to the faces of his followers, and so he rallied his spirit of bravado, and replied:

"Sure Shot Seth, you know too much to live."

"And you too little to die."

"And, therefore," the chief continued, "I shall see that you do not escape this time. Nor your band either."

He turned aside and held a short, inaudible consultation with his braves. When the pow-wow had ended, Hawk-Eyes took the majority of his warriors and left, going toward the lake. Seth felt sure that the Boy Brigade was the objective point of this movement.

Those left in charge of the prisoner finally took him and moved away toward the lake also. On reaching the water they embarked in a canoe for the interior of the lake. Two other savages in a canoe, that was sunk to its gunwales under a load of stones, followed behind. A third canoe with three occupants, towing behind a huge log by means of a rope made of fibrous bark, followed the second.

When about one hundred yards from the sunken cabin of Neptune, the canoe of the prisoner stopped. The second ran alongside of it, though leaving a few feet of space between into which the third party towed the logs.

Something of the truth now entered Seth's mind, and sent a shudder through his veins. He believed he was to be lashed to the log and left to die, where his friends, as well as his enemies, could witness his agonies, and yet render him no assistance. Nor was he left in a moment's doubt. The red-skins lifted him from the canoe and laid him back down upon the log. He was then bound with strips of tough, fibrous bark as securely as though he was a part of the log itself. His hands were doubled under the log and bound so that he could not move a muscle.

A long rope of bark was next attached to the log and the canoe loaded with rock. Then the bottom of the canoe was cut through in several places; the craft filled with water and sunk to the bottom of the lake, securely anchoring the log in the center of the little sheet.

Having completed their fiendish work, the savages retired to the woods to await the result.

Seth at once saw through the whole of this devilish work; they had set a trap for the rest of the Brigade. Exposed as he was, the red-skins knew full well that his friends would discover his situation and endeavor to relieve him, when they—the savages—would pounce down upon them from their coverts along the shore like hawks upon a brood.

Seth's hands and feet were in the water, and as a strong breeze now disturbed the surface of the lake, tiny waves dashed against the log and sprinkled their spray over him. Rendered weak with the loss of blood and the terror of his situation, this exposure affected him greatly. He could not turn his head; he could not move a muscle; nor could he breathe with half his usual freedom. He could see nothing but the sky, from which the light of day was fast fading, for by this time the sun had gone down. He saw long, "mare tail" clouds stretched across the sky, which were a forewarning of a night of wind.

As the twilight shadows deepened around him, he summoned all his strength and sent forth the Brigade's signal of distress. It was answered from the northern shore; but the answer was immediately followed by the report of a rifle—evidence that the savages were in close proximity to the Brigade.

Darkness at length fell. The sky was overcast with swift-moving clouds. The wind swept across the Black Woods and tossed the surface of the lake into tiny billows. Seth was soon drenched to the skin and chilled to the marrow. An inevitable death stared him in the face. Wave after wave broke over him. He rose and fell and tossed like an egg-shell on the crest of the billows. The rush and roar of the elements drowned all other sounds. Deep, black and boundless as eternity grew the darkness around him. A thousand vague and awful horrors crowded upon his soul. Strange visions rose up before him and hovered like spirits around. Strange, icy arms were clasped around him like hoops of steel. Then followed an awful roaring and the sensation of being swept away into the illimitable depths of eternity. Down, down, deeper and deeper into the unknown void he felt himself sinking—that buzzing roar gradually dissolving into the notes of far-off music, sweet and plaintive, and finally fading into that oblivion which knows no pain, no suffering—the hand-maid of Death.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SILENT SLAYERS OF THE LAKE.

WITH anxious, eager hearts the Boy Brigade watched their young leader depart upon his exploring expedition. They watched him as he glided out over the glassy waters of the lake toward the spot where the floating-cabin of Neptune went down, never dreaming that lynx-eyed danger lurked in ambush for him until they saw the three canoes loaded with savages put out from different points around the shore.

At that time Seth was in the vicinity of the sunken craft; and contrary to his usual precaution, appeared not to see his peril; whereupon, Hooseah gave the signal of danger. In a moment Seth began his retreat, and the Brigade prepared to cover it; but, at the most critical moment, a score of savages charged upon them from the woods, compelling them to seek shelter in the deeper shadows back from the lake. They lost no time in doing, and had the good fortune to stumble into a "windfall"—a number of large trees uprooted and piled in such a way as to afford a temporary defense. The savages endeavored to dislodge them from their retreat, but were met with such vigorous resistance that they were compelled to relinquish their object and seek shelter from the unerring rifles of the Brigade.

The latter now had a moment's respite to enumerate their casualties. To the fear and regrets of all, one of the band, Teddy O'Roop, the Irish lad, was

missing; and there was not a doubt left in the mind of any one but that he had been killed. Two others had been slightly wounded; and the worst of all, their beloved young leader was, ere this, in the power of his cruel enemy. Nothing but the intervention of Providence could save him.

The yells that finally rose along the lake told that their worst fears had been realized—Seth was a captive. Disasters were falling thick and fast upon the Boy Brigade.

"What do you suppose the fate of Sure Shot will be?" asked Harris.

"No doubt a horrible death," replied Justin Gray. A look of sadness overspread each countenance and a solemn grief trembled upon each lip. Still the courage of the little band did not flag. Taught by past experience and similar trying circumstances, they resolved to put forth every effort in behalf of their young friend and leader—to risk life and limb in an attempt to save him.

As nothing had been seen of their enemies since entering the "windfall," Hooseah was sent out to reconnoiter. He soon returned and announced the way clear to the lake. The savages had doubtless withdrawn to join their friends in their fiendish triumph over the capture of Sure Shot Seth. The Brigade left their retreat and stole back to the shore of the lake. They found the little sheet deserted; not a sign of Seth, his canoe, or the savages could be seen.

Scouts were at once sent in opposite directions around the lake, but, before they returned the Brigade saw the savages emerge from the forest on the opposite side of the lake, enter a canoe with Seth, and row out upon the water. Half an hour later they saw the object of this movement. Seth had been left almost in the middle of the lake, bound to a log anchored there, by some means or other.

The object of the red-skins was evident; it was the capture of any one who might attempt Seth's rescue. And, as the Brigade was now without a boat of any kind, and the water was growing rough, it would be next to impossible to reach their friend by swimming.

To add to their distress, the forest shadows, the little band paced uneasily, suffering all the excruciating misery that the predicament of their young captain could force upon them. I said all; this, however, was not the case, exactly. Old Joyful Jim sat down and with that grim, queer smile that had been noticed before, on different occasions, upon his face, he watched the hapless young adventurer.

"My God, boys!" Justin Gray finally exclaimed, his face marked by desperation. "I can stand this no longer; Seth must be saved! I will swim out there and release him, if I die for it."

"Wass than useless to undertake to swim out thar now," said old Jim. "Jist wait; it'll soon be dark; then mebbe some of us can make it."

"But, he may be dead by that time," persisted Gray.

"Don't fool yerself; Seth's not goin' to give up so easy as that. I never see'd a boy that was as chucky, jam full of life as that Seth. No, them 'larned bein-stones' don't want him dead till they git us; therefore, we want to save caloric, and I'll bet Sure Shot'll live to impale more'n one red-skin on a sun-beam."

"I wish I knew that you spoke prophetically, Jim," said Gray, puzzled by the indifferent view the old trader took of the matter, and the coolness he had manifested all along.

"Wait and you'll see, was the answer."

They did wait until darkness set in; but time had seemed to lag so weirdly that all hope of Seth's escape had about died out. It seemed impossible for him to have lived so long. Night shut every object from view upon the lake; and only the roar of the wind and the moan of the woods broke upon the eager ears of the little band.

Old Jim left the Brigade with the avowed purpose of reconnoitering the northern shore of the lake; while Hooseah and Justin Gray prepared to swim out to Seth's rescue, be the result what it might.

These two boys had no superiors in watercraft; and upon several occasions had displayed almost superhuman strength and endurance, as well as wonderful feats, in the water. They were well aware of the dangers and difficulties they would have to combat; but there was no peril, no hardship they would not undertake in behalf of their beloved young leader. So, they divested themselves of most of their clothing, and having securely fastened their hunting knives to the ends of long, slender rods, they "put to sea." They swam side by side, lying upon their backs, their hands and arms submerged, their hastily improvised lances slightly elevated and the points touching like the antennae of insects.

The darkness was intense, and as the lake was ribbed and furrowed by waves, Le Subtile Wolf and the Beaver experienced considerable unpleasantness as they cut their way through the water, side by side. They could just distinguish each other's presence along the surface of the water. They guided themselves by the wind and waves. They had gone nearly a hundred yards when a sound fell upon the ears of the Beaver that caused him to start. It was the dip of a paddle. Le Subtile Wolf answered in a similar manner, when both at once became silent and motionless on the water.

Without a doubt a canoe was approaching. They could hear the dip of the paddle, and the prow cutting the waves. It came closer and closer.

They can now see the dark outlines of the hull, along the surface of the water, and the shadowy outlines of grotesque figures above it. They know what it means. It is a savage canoe patrolling the lake for enemies. They prepare to act, for their situation is perilous.

There were, at least, six red-skins in the canoe

and they were coming almost directly toward the boys, who touched their lances twice, then drew them back, and when the canoe came up, thrust the weapons forward into two of the upright figures within it. A yell of agony burst from the warriors' lips, and a momentary confusion followed. The unsuspecting warriors knew not from whence those death blows had come, so silently had they been dealt, so dark was the surrounding. The paddlers dropped their blades, and assisted their companions with the two struggling in the agonies of death. This left the canoe within reach of the Beaver and Le Subtile Wolf, who, following up the advantage gained, launched their terrible weapons through the darkness again. Two more of the six had been stricken down by the deadly sting of death; and before the others could recover from their fear and consternation, the final blow had been struck and the two desperate boys had won a signal victory.

When assured that they had nothing more to fear of those in the canoe, they swam alongside of the boat and threw themselves into it. To consign the bodies to the troubled waves was but the work of a moment, then each laying his lance by his side, took up a paddle.

It required some moments now for them to get their course, for in the silent and deadly encounter they had lost their bearings. When assured they were right, they dipped their blades and crept away through the gloom. They were now compelled to use more precaution than ever, for the water, when lying with their ears upon it, was a better conductor of sound than the air. Moreover, their elevation rendered it more difficult to discern objects around them. But they felt themselves equal to the occasion, being greatly encouraged by their recent victory. It had been a part of their programme to maneuver for the capture of a canoe in which to convey their friend ashore, should they succeed in releasing him. It was this that they had in view when they constructed the deadly weapons they carried with them.

There was such a harmony of instincts in these two boys, trained as they had been together, that they had not spoken a dozen words since leaving the shore. The touch of their lances had kept them together, and any sudden movement of the weapon by one seemed to convey his thoughts to the other as naturally as one conveys words upon the electric telegraph. With their hands centered upon the one great object of mercy, it was natural enough that the details followed in intuitive harmony. One made no movement that did not "dove-tail," as it were, with the other's, and with this silent and perfect sameness of action, which was, in a manner, characteristic of the whole Brigade, had they been enabled to accomplish so much in the gloom.

They moved on, and were finally nearing the spot where they had last seen Seth tossing on the waves, when the sound of voices fell upon their ears. They at once ceased paddling, and holding the blades so that their boats might not drift back, they listened. They could hear the audible dip of a paddle, mingled with a voice speaking English. The boat of the unknown was crossing the path of our two adventurous friends, and when nearly opposite the prow of their boat, they heard the person speaking say:

"I tell ye, boss, I've jist all I can do to keep that Boy Brigade off the scent. I've been afraid, a time or two, that they'd find out the little game I'm playing."

A shudder thrilled through the forms of the two boys, and they clutched their lances as if to strike. As the boat drew nearer and passed on by them, they recognized the voice of the speaker.

It was that of Joyful Jim!

Was he a traitor to the Boy Brigade? Alas! what else could he have been?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOYFUL JAMES UNDER A CLOUD.

THE Beaver and Le Subtile Wolf continued on until they supposed they were in the vicinity of the log to which Seth was bound; but to their surprise and pain they could find nothing of their young friend. They searched the water over and over, but without reward; and were finally compelled to give up the search.

Sad and heavy-hearted, they returned to shore with the intelligence of Seth's disappearance, no doubt beneath the waves of the wind-tossed little sea.

The little band was plunged into the deepest gloom. Their hearts sunk within them, and their courage seemed to falter. To add still more to the intensity of their feelings, the words that Justin Gray and Hooseah had overheard upon the lake had been construed into the words of a traitor.

"I have often remarked the indifference with which old Jim regarded some things of a serious nature to us," said Gray; "especially things connected with this lake."

"Yes," replied Mr. Harris, "I have noticed that on different occasions."

"But," said Tom Grayson, inclined to give old Jim the benefit of a doubt, "hasn't he done things since he has been with us that would be a little unaccountable if he was a traitor to us?"

"Yes; but that has been part of his tactics to mislead us," said Gray. "He has pretended to serve us, while he has a—"

"Hoo!" exclaimed Le Subtile Wolf, suddenly; "light on lake—s-e him!"

True enough, a dim light had become visible near the middle of the lake. It shot a long, subdued beam across the water to where our friends stood. It was such a light as shines from a window on a

dark night, and seemed to be elevated a few feet above the surface of the lake.

One of the boys decided that it must be a will-o'-the-wisp; but this idea was exploded by the light disappearing ever and anon as though forms were passing to and fro between.

The boys puzzled themselves over this light for more than an hour, but they could obtain no definite information regarding it, and were at length compelled to give it up and retire to some safer point in which to pass the weary, dreary hours of night. They sought the "windfall," which had afforded them a safe retreat during the day; and having posted two guards that were to be relieved at intervals of two hours, the rest lay down to sleep and give their tired minds repose.

Little sleep, however, closed the eyes of the periled band that night; and when one did fall into a doze, the vagaries of an excited brain conjured up a thousand horrors and dangers.

Slowly and wearily the night dragged away, and with its darkness went many of the terrors born of it. Bright and early the boys all were astir, but not until the rising sun had dispelled every shadow did they venture out of their retreat.

Having first partaken of their morning repast, they started toward the lake. They had proceeded but a short distance when a "chirp" like that of a bird overhead caused them all to look up; when, to their astonishment, they saw old Joyful Jim reclining in a sort of hammock attached to a limb, looking as smiling and innocent as a clown in a circus.

Mechanically the Brigade drew back the hammers of their guns, while a look of sudden surprise and unutterable scorn mounted their faces.

"Careful! careful!" exclaimed the old fellow, throwing up his hands; "it's me, Joyful James! Don't shoot—be—avens!"

The last exclamation was occasioned by a savage yell not far away, and quick as a flash the Brigade turned and started back to the windfall; while old Jim hopped out of his bed and began to scramble down the tree in a hurry. As soon as he had reached the ground, he followed the Brigade, and was nearing the windfall, in which the boys were already ensconced, when a savage with an uplifted tomahawk sprang from behind a tree and confronted him. As the murderous weapon of the savage descended, it was dextrously warded off by the gun-barrel of the white man. But the sudden deviation of the tomahawk, and the force with which it fell upon the gun-barrel, carried both from the hands of their owners, leaving them face to face and empty-handed.

Old Jim expected a shot from the Boy Brigade to help him out of his difficulty; but as it was not forthcoming, while a dozen Indians behind him were, he saw that he must act with dispatch. He thrust forward his bony hands, and seizing the savage by the throat and waist, raised him aloft as though he were a child, and as Jupiter hurled his thunderbolts against the mountain, so he hurled the red-skin to the earth, crushing the life out of him. Then he grabbed up his rifle and attempted to escape inside the windfall; but before he could do so, three Indians were upon him, and turning, he fought them with the fierceness and desperation of a tiger driven at bay. With clubbed rifle he swept the foe down before him. The breech of the weapon snapping off left him the iron barrel, a formidable weapon that crushed and crunched its way through the air around the power that wielded it.

The Boy Brigade watched the conflict with astonishment. They saw the old man in combat with those whom they had decided were his friends. But the thought that they might be mistaken flashed across their minds the instant they caught sight of his face. It seemed transformed to that of a madman. The cords in his neck and face had swelled out almost to bursting. His eyes glowed with the ferocity of a Fury. He seemed endowed with superhuman power as he fought for his life. The iron weapon in his hand had become bespattered with the blood of his victims. It fairly dripped with gore. The Brigade saw it. It was enough—it told them that old Jim was no friend to the red-skins, and in another moment they were out of their covert to the rescue of the brave and heroic old man.

The red-skins were at once driven away; and with Jim, the Brigade sought their shelter again. Here the old ex-trader sunk down, weak and helpless, almost as if stricken with paralysis. His nervous system had been strung to such a tension by excitement that the sudden relapse completely prostrated him. The boys supposed he had been wounded, and ran to his assistance, all anxious to serve him.

"Where are you hurt Jim?" Justin Gray inquired.

"Now-ah in partickler," he answered; "my physical stamina's goin' back on me, that's all. But didn't I make the claret fly, though, outer them red-skins? Shades of the Temple! I never got into such a muss in all my life, and I thought you fellows war never comin' to help me. Reckon you didn't want to spill my fan, eh?"

The boys exchanged significant glances, but remained quiet. Old Jim finally recovered his strength and rose to his feet, with the announcement that he was him self again.

As the Indians did not make any further demonstration upon the windfall, the Brigade resolved to leave it and go down to the lake and make some inquiries regarding the light they had seen during the night, as old Jim could say nothing definite regarding it.

They struck the lake where they could command a full view of its surface; and, as they ran their eyes over it, an exclamation burst from every lip.

Out near the center of the lake they beheld the

floating cabin of old Neptune, or one exactly like it, resting calmly upon the placid bosom of the little sheet. From one of its chimneys a thin wreath of smoke was curling, and through the open door, looking south, the lithe form of a female was passing to and fro.

What did it mean? This was the question that passed from lip to lip; but no one could answer. It was a mystery within a mystery.

CHAPTER XXIX. LIFE IN A NEW WORLD.

We left Sure Shot Seth unconscious upon a log in the middle of the lake, overcome by the loss of blood, cold, and the horrors of his situation. But he was not left alone here to die. Under the canopy of night a canoe crept across the water with two cloaked occupants, who released the youth from the log, took his almost helpless form aboard, and then disappeared in the direction they had come.

How long he had remained unconscious Sure Shot Seth had no means of telling; but when reason began to assert its power, it was with a vague uncertainty that he regarded his state of existence. He found that he was not in the water nor upon the log, of which he maintained an indistinct recollection; but upon a soft pallet surrounded by walls, and shadowy forms that were passing around him. The murmur of voices in the distance also assured him of the vague, dreamy existence in some sphere or other; but his mind was so heavy and depressed that he could not collect his thoughts. Little by little, however, objects around him began to assume more tangible and material shape. Out of the shalows of unconsciousness those moving figures gradually unfolded themselves until he found that he was surrounded by men and women. At length he had so far recovered as to recognize a face bending over him. It was that of Vishnia, the Maid of the Valley. At one side sat her father, old Neptune. With their presence was connected some vague horror. He closed his eyes and tried to recall the past. One by one the events of the last few days came trooping back; and when at length a remembrance of the sinking of old Neptune's cabin, with all on board, entered his mind, a cry burst from his lips. They lived as he did himself; but was it not in another sphere? They had surely been drowned in Lake Luster and passed into another existence. He had met with a similar fate on the log where the savages had left him. This explanation seemed cogent enough to him; but as another thought flashed into his mind, he started up, crying out:

"Where is she? Maggie?"

"Here," responded a soft voice, and Maggie Harris appeared before him, her face radiant with love and joy.

"Then we are all here," he said, sinking back upon his couch, a great load seeming to have been removed from his brain.

"Yes, Seth, we are all safe in the cabin of Neptune," answered Maggie, speaking in a low, gentle voice.

"But have we all not undergone a change? we are not on earth, are we?" the half-delirious youth asked; "you were all drowned when the cabin sunk, were you not?"

"No, Seth," answered Maggie, "we were not drowned. This is a wonderful structure. Neptune sunk it at his pleasure to save us from the savages. Every opening can be hermetically sealed, so that no water can enter the rooms. It was Neptune that rescued you and brought you here. You have long been unconscious."

Her words swept away the cloud that hovered over the youth's mind; and in a moment he was in full possession of his senses. He opened his eyes and gazed around him. He saw that the room was nicely furnished. The walls, which gradually sloped from the floor to the apex overhead, were heavily painted and varnished. A small sheet-iron stove occupied one end of the long room. In one corner were cooking utensils and dishes. Further down the room was a table covered with books. In the other end was a sort of a stand or work-bench, upon which lay an almost countless number of tools. A machine—apparently unfinished—of some kind or other, and composed of innumerable cogs, wheels and pulleys, stood upon the table. On the floor near the bench were the other parts of complicated machinery, which were evidence themselves of the occupation of old Neptune. Under the table were two rubber canoes, one large, one small.

Near the center of the room was something that puzzled our hero. It was a huge box with a crank on one side and a fly-wheel on the other. But what could it be used for? At first he concluded that it was some apparatus for propelling the floating cabin, if such the domicile might be termed; but, further investigation revealed a long rubber hose lying coiled at the foot of the machine, and which led to the supposition that it was used for manipulating the craft.

In addition to these things, some wearing apparel, two or three rifles, a guitar, some beautiful pictures, a couple of pallets and some other articles and ornaments composed the furniture of the strange place.

Three windows, of but a single large pane each, lighted the room, while overhead were four openings, one of which served as a chimney, the others as ventilators.

Altogether it was a strange structure; but in perfect keeping with the wild mysterious air that surrounded its owner, old Neptune, and his fair and lovely daughter, Vishnia.

There was nothing to fear in the old man's looks; on the contrary there was a majesty in his tall form, his intellectual face and patriarchal beard, that commanded respect and admiration. His dark

gray eyes, massive brows and expressive mouth, carried the expression of a deep thinker and profound student of nature with them.

He came and sat down by Seth, administered stimulants to him, and at the same time kept up an easy pleasant conversation. The former strengthened his body, the latter his mind; and in the course of a few hours the youth was on his feet. Neptune conducted him to the door and out upon the porch, from whence he had a fair view of Lake Luster and the surrounding shores. He searched the latter for some signs of his friends; but saw nothing. The beach seemed entirely deserted.

"I wonder if my friends are alive?" he said to the old man.

"They were at ten o'clock last night," replied Neptune, "and I think they had a conflict with the savages this morning, for I heard a sharp firing over on the west shore."

"The savages seem determined on the destruction of the Boy Brigade," said Seth, seriously.

"Yes; and the floating-palace of old Neptune."

"But you can outwit them when we cannot."

The old man burst into a peal of laughter.

Seth continued:

"Your residence here is a wonderful structure. Its mechanism surpasses my comprehension."

"No doubt of it, my boy; but if you will come with me inside, I will explain the whole thing to you in a satisfactory manner."

As they turned to go in, Seth caught sight of a savage standing on the eastern shore; and by his dress, recognized him as Hawk-Eyes, the Boy Chief.

CHAPTER XXX.

PRINCIPLE OF THE FLOATING CABIN.

WHEN Seth and Neptune entered the cabin, Vishnia was playing upon the harp from which she had called forth such ravishing strains a few nights previous on Rock Island. The old man motioned Seth to a seat, then sat down himself, and burying his face in his hands remained silent until his daughter had ceased playing. Then, raising his head and nervously running his fingers through his gray locks, he took a book from the shelf near at hand, and turning to Seth, read, in a clear voice, as follows:

"PRINCIPLES OF FLotation.—When a body is plunged into a liquid, it is urged downward by its proper weight, and upward by the buoyant effort of the liquid. If the density of the immersed body is the same as that of the liquid, its weight will be equal to the buoyant effort of the liquid, and it will remain in equilibrium wherever it may be placed. If the density of the body is greater than that of the liquid, its weight will be greater than the buoyant effort and the body will sink to the bottom. If the density of the body is less than that of the liquid, its weight will be less than the buoyant effort, and the body will rise to the surface. The body will continue to rise until the weight of the displaced liquid equals that of the body, when it will come to a rest."

"Now," said the old man, closing the book, "these are the philosophical principles upon which my craft here is constructed. I have always been a firm believer in the ability of talent and genius to construct a submarine house and boat in which people may live and travel under water as well as on the surface of the earth and water. The former I have demonstrated to my satisfaction. In the first place, I had a reservoir constructed thirty feet long, twelve feet wide, and twelve inches deep. Its capacity, therefore, is three hundred and sixty cubic feet. It was made air-tight, and provided with stop-cock and faucets, and loaded with stone until its density was almost equal to that of the water. Then on top of this reservoir this cabin was erected, and the additional weight caused the reservoir to sink still deeper so that a part of the cabin is submerged. You can see that the threshold of the door is two feet above the floor, which brings the line of flotation nearly the same height above the floor, so that a portion of the cabin is always under water. The cabin, as you saw, was covered with galvanized sheet-iron, all soldered together, and the door and windows made to close hermetically. As the amount of water displaced by the air chamber, below, is equal to the weight of the unsubmerged part of the cabin, all I have to do, to sink the whole concern is to open a faucet and let the reservoir fill with water, when down we go. The shape of the roof aids the downward pressure. While thus submerged, we receive fresh air through those pipes overhead that project above the surface of the water."

"But suppose you should sink beyond your depth, then those pipes would flood the interior," said Seth.

"That is an obstacle that I propose to overcome soon," continued the old man, thoughtfully. "I propose to invent an apparatus by which a supply of fresh air can be had at pleasure, even when fathoms below the surface. But, when I wish to rise to the surface, I force the water from the reservoir below by means of this force-pump; and the buoyant effort carries me to the surface. This much have I demonstrated in living under the water. As to traveling under the water, I am a firm believer in its accomplishment; and have already invented a little machine that travels, by means of a screw worked by a series of clock-works just underneath the surface of the water. As soon as I had accomplished this, the idea of a self-moving torpedo was suggested to my mind; and as rumors of a war were abroad in the land, I thought it a good time to invent something of the kind, and so I went to work; and how well I succeeded, you have doubtless seen illustrated within the past few days."

"I have seen a savage canoe and raft blown out of the water within the past day or two, if that is what you have reference to," answered Seth, who

had become deeply interested in the man's explanations.

"It is; and if I had possessed more than the two torpedoes, no savage canoe would ever have reached my cabin. Since the last attack, however, I have completed another, ready for some desperate emergency, for which I am hourly looking."

"But I don't see how you can send your torpedoes so direct as to intercept the craft of the enemy every time," said Seth.

"Well, it requires care. The instrument being shaped somewhat like a fish, has, what I call 'sights,' on each end, by means of which I get it set on a line directly with the object I wish it to strike. The principal machinery is submerged, and to prevent it sinking, a buoy is attached to it which floats on the water's surface. If the water is smooth and there is no cross waves, or other objects to interfere, the machine will glide away in a line straight as a bullet could travel. When the canoe is reached, an upright wire that protrudes just above the water, strikes the boat, and having connection with the inside machinery, fires a pistol which in turn fires the magazine, and the explosion follows. So far, I have tested it only on a small scale; but propose to apply the same motor to a magazine sufficient to blow a ship-of-war out of existence."

"I daresay you will succeed; but I am surprised at your coming here, into this wild, savage country to pursue your experiments," said Seth.

"Tis the seclusion, the seclusion, my son, that I sought out here," the old man said, glancing vaguely out across the lake.

"Neptune, then, is not your name?" observed Seth.

"Not at all," was the laconic reply of the old man. Seth relapsed into silence; he saw that the old man had communicated all that he seemed desirous of doing, and, finally, he rose and going to where Maggie and Vishnia were seated said:

"Maggie, your father and friends mourned you as dead yesterday when they saw this craft sink beneath the waves."

"Poor papa!" said Maggie, sadly, "I know he must have suffered," and the tears welled up into her eyes.

"Yes; and had you been lost I would have considered myself, in a measure, the cause; for I should not have left you the other day when I did."

"You did only what you supposed to be for the best, Seth," she said, gently.

"I know it; but then I cannot be too thoughtful of one who saved my life at great expense to herself."

"It was not only a duty, but a pleasure," Maggie answered, her eyes sparkling with all the true inwardness of a woman's love; "if the future has no perils, I'll never regret the past."

"Well, I hope our dangers are past; but I fear we have much trouble yet to encounter. A few moments ago I saw our enemy, Ivan Le Clercq. Yesterday I stood face to face with him. It is his desire to get you into his power, and me out of existence. He is a desperate character, and I shall always believe that he knew of the intended attack on the Agency, if he did not help plan it. Without some previous merit he could not have attained the power of a war-chief in a single day. I daresay he has been the enemy's agent among us."

"Friend March," called out old Neptune, who was standing at the open door, "will you come this way a moment? I want your opinion on a little matter."

"Yes, sir," answered Seth, and he walked down to the old man.

"What do you think of the prospect for a battle?" the latter asked, pointing out upon the lake where three canoes, filled with savages, were approaching.

"Too promising," answered Seth; "but if you will provide me with a rifle I assure you they'll not reach here alive, if I know myself."

"That you can have, Seth," replied old Neptune, and turning aside he took a rifle from the wall and handed it to the youth; "I have heard that you are called Sure Shot on account of your marksmanship; so now I want to see your skill demonstrated."

They went out upon the platform. Seth looked the rifle carefully over, balanced it upon his hand, tried the trigger and peeped through the sights. Then with a satisfied air he drew the hammer back, raised the piece, and, taking deliberate aim at the nearest savage, fired. A yell followed the report; and the next moment not a savage was to be seen. They had elevated, over the prow of each canoe, a sort of a breast-work made of slabs thick enough to resist bullets. Three or four of these had been made fast to cross-pieces, and being about five feet long and four wide completely covered the inmates of each boat.

No sooner did Neptune discover this than his face assumed a look of serious gravity. He shook his head in a doubtful manner, and then turning to Seth said:

"I am afraid we will be unable to repel that force."

"They are well covered from bullets, friend Neptune," answered Seth, "and seem determined on the capture of your craft. However, we can prepare to give them a reception."

"Let them come," said the old man; "if they get the boat they'll have to dive for it."

"Then you propose to sink?"

"Come in; I want you to realize the marvels of Nature under the waves," answered the old artisan. Seth turned and followed him into the cabin.

The door was closed and barred, and panels were placed over each window, shutting out the light.

"The Indians are coming again, children," the old man said to the two girls, "and we have got to go down."

Vishnia was unmoved by the news; but Maggie grew a shade pale, and her eyes having sought those of Seth, she involuntarily drew nearer to

him through fear and the yearnings of her heart. Neptune walked to one end of the room and seizing a post that protruded through the floor pulled it upward a few inches.

Instantly, almost, Seth felt a tremor pass through the cabin followed by the rush and roar of water under them. There was a downward motion of the building; a cloud seemed to pass over the windows and the cabin came to rest on the lake's bottom.

With a feeling akin to awe, Sure Shot Seth glanced around as if expecting to see the sides of the structure give way under the pressure upon it. But in a moment all became settled, and stepping under one of the holes in the roof he glanced through it. He saw the blue sky, and heard the surge of the waves above him.

"What do you think of my submarine hut, Seth?" the old man asked, his face beaming satisfaction.

"So far it is a success," answered our hero; "but if the enemy finds out the use of those pipes it would be an easy matter to flood us in here."

"But I don't want them to find it out," replied Neptune.

"But how are you going to prevent it?"

"I cannot prevent it; but should one of them dare to look down one of the chimneys he will be shot while in the act."

"Yes, you can do that," replied Seth; for all, the youth felt that their situation would be a dangerous one should the enemy make a close investigation of the sunken craft. And this they were likely to do, for the cabin having risen from a previous submergence would doubtless lead to a solution of the mystery connected with it.

Several minutes elapsed. The water had become still. A clear twilight pervaded the submarine hut. Seth went to one of the windows and together the two walked to one of the windows and gazed out. The water around them was clear and transparent almost as the atmosphere. A hundred little minnows darted and flashed across their vision like birds in the air. Some of them grew bolder and bolder, and approached within a few feet of the window-pane. Presently a whole shoal of large fish came trooping along and began to hover around the window. A huge fellow finally approached the glass slowly, cautiously. He came so close that Seth and Maggie could see his bright eyes, the movement of his fins, and the very quiver of his nose.

The scene was a beautiful one, rendered all the more grand by the sun's rays, which, falling obliquely upon the water, encircled the fish in all the prismatic colors of the rainbow.

"Isn't that delightful!" exclaimed Maggie, forgetting their danger in her admiration for the scene, and joy at being at Seth's side.

"It is very beautiful," answered Seth.

"Yes, it is beautiful, my young friends," said Neptune; "but suppose we were in the middle of the sea? What grand sights would be presented to our gaze! Fish of all kinds, the monsters of the deep; beautiful submarine forests; mountains and valleys, and the wondrous formations of the coral-reef polyp. I shall yet complete a boat similar to this, by which I will descend to the bottom of old ocean, and there gaze upon the wonders, and drag to light the mysteries of the deep. I tell you this is no dream—it's a stern reality."

"I hope you will be successful, Neptune," replied Seth, "for the dangers and privations you are undergoing in the interest of science deserve great reward."

At this juncture a shadow appeared over the window where the young folks stood.

A little cry burst from Maggie's lips and she shrank closer to Seth, grasping his arm as if to prevent falling. The color faded from her cheeks; her lips grew white with fear; and her eyes became fixed as they gazed upward through the window.

"What is it, Maggie?" asked Seth.

"Look!" she answered.

Seth did as directed, and, to his surprise and horror, beheld a canoe resting upon the surface of the lake, nearly over them; while in the craft he could distinctly see four savages, all of whom were gazing down through the clear water at the little window—into his very face!

CHAPTER XXXI.

NEPTUNE NEPTUNE NO MORE!

Seth started back in alarm, calling the attention of Neptune to the proximity of the enemy.

The old man evinced some uneasiness, and advancing to the pump, looked out. The foe were still there, the canoe appearing to rest in the air above, so clear and transparent was the water. They were still gazing down at the little window, their black ferret-like eyes seeming to dart rays of diabolical terror into the very souls of our friends.

Neptune stood and watched them for a moment, then turned away. Seth noticed that a look of uneasiness was upon his face; and when he saw the old man take a brace of revolvers from a box on his work-bench and examine their priming he felt satisfied that the cabin was in danger.

"The red scavengers of the forest may give us trouble, my young friends," he said. "They have doubtless discovered the nature of our boat, and may tamper with those air-pipes, three of which are open. But in order that their curiosity should lead them to look through one of the openings, may be fully satisfied, I want each tube guarded, and the moment a red-skin's face appears above it, a bullet put through his savage brain."

"But suppose they undertake to chop off those pipes below water-mark without exposing themselves, what'll we do?" questioned Seth.

"In such a case we will have to rise to the surface and fight it out," replied Neptune.

"Father," cried Vishnia, who was watching at the window, "the canoe is moving over the cabin."

"Seth, here is a revolver; watch that tube, will you?" asked Neptune.

Seth took the weapon, and scarcely had he taken his position under the pipe ere a dark object appeared at the upper end, and in a moment all light was excluded therefrom. Believing it to be a red-skin's face, he raised his revolver and fired. A groan of agony, followed by the dripping of something warm upon his hands, and the appearance of daylight at the top of the tube, told the youth that his aim had been fatal.

The dip of paddles, the sound of excited voices, and the splash of the water above, told of the excitement that prevailed among the red-skins. And this increased the fears of old Neptune, for he now saw that his submarine hut was not invulnerable to the attack of canoes. To prevent accident, he caused the panels to be closed over the windows, thus excluding all light except that which struggled down through the pipes above.

For some time the little band was kept in dire suspense by the foe. What their next movement would be, they could not conjecture. They entertained hopes of the red-skins withdrawing; but as the moments passed, and their presence continued above, these hopes were dispelled by the sound of a blow like that of an ax, which sent a tremor through the whole building and a chill to the hearts of its inmates.

The meaning was obvious enough—the enemy had attacked the pipes with their hatchets.

A cry of terror burst from Vishnia's lips, while, with a look of awful resolve on her father's face, he sprang to the pump in the center of the room. With all the power of a Hercules, he applied himself to the work of saving himself and friends.

The pump worked almost noiselessly, and as the water, which overcame the buoyant effort of the structure, was gradually forced from the reservoir beneath by the double-action machine, the submarine cabin began to rise toward the surface. Nothing was more evident of this fact than the cries of dismay and baffled triumph that rose from the lips of the red-skins. Their blows upon the tubes ceased, but were resumed upon the sides of the plated structure with the fury of demons.

The cabin continued to rise rapidly, and in ten minutes' time had reached its line of flotation. Then the faucet and stop-cock were closed, and Neptune's labor was done for the time being.

They had now escaped drowning no doubt to encounter another death more horrible at the hands of the red barbarians thundering at the door. But Seth and the old man resolved to sell their lives dearly, and with revolvers in hand stood ready for the worst.

Pushing aside one of the panels that protected a window, Neptune thrust his revolver through the glass and opened a deadly fire upon the foe, driving them beyond range around the angle of the building. This he repeated, with the assistance of Seth, upon the other sides, and to their happy surprise the enemy was compelled to beat a retreat shoreward with serious loss. They had, however, gained a partial victory. They had unraveled the mystery of the submarine hut, and inflicted such damage upon it as would prevent its being sunk with impunity again. The windows were shattered, and in several places the wall had been battered and hacked until daylight was visible through it. In fact, the floating cabin of Neptune was almost a wreck.

Neptune sighed with the deepest regret as he looked upon the ruthless spoliation of his craft—the end of his vague, but cherished hopes of immortality.

The men went out upon the porch and gazed around them. A shout of triumph greeted them from the western shore, and the presence of the Boy Brigade evoked an answer from the lips of Neptune and Seth. Old Joyful Jim came close to the water's edge and shouted aloud to those upon the craft; but Satan himself seemed to have sent his imps broadcast throughout the Black Woods, and before answer could be given back, a horde of red-skins put the Brigade to flight.

"It seems as though we are all doomed to certain destruction," said the old man, gravely, seriously.

"Yes; those red-skins will give us no peace as long as we are upon this craft," answered Seth; "therefore I would suggest that we leave it under cover of the coming night."

"But, my boy," replied Neptune, "you will not have strength to endure a long, laborious flight. You are thin and pale as a sheet."

"I know I have suffered the loss of strength and blood; but I think I could stand a forced march to the Agency."

"Perhaps," replied Neptune, gazing away like one plunged in deep deliberation; "therefore we must avail ourselves of the shadows of the coming night, as you suggest, Seth, and get away."

With this understanding, the little party made preparations for flight. A gloom settled upon the brow of Neptune over the thought of deserting his quiet retreat. But Vishnia seemed pleased with the idea that was to release her from the seclusion of a wildwood prison and her dangerous thralldom.

Soon after darkness had fully set in, Neptune and his party began their retreat. By means of a long pole, the raft was set in motion by the old man. They moved slowly toward the western shore, the nearest point to land. It was their intention to approach the shore as near as possible, then take to the two rubber boats.

Suddenly two canoes shot alongside of them and a dozen dusky figures in the boats became visible to

the eyes of old Neptune who was on the look-out for danger.

Turning, he sprang into the cabin and closed the door after him. A yell rose in the night, loud and jarring. Blows fell upon the cabin thick and furious. Another attack had begun.

"My God, we are attacked again!" shouted old Neptune, growing furious.

A cry of despair escaped the maidens' lips.

The light inside was at once put out; the windows opened, and a random firing opened upon the foe; but with but little success. The darkness favored the enemy.

In the midst of the tumult of the attack a shrill cry resembling that of a beaver was heard to come from out upon the lake.

Seth, who stood near the window, recognized it as the cry of Justin Gray, the Beaver, and at once gave an answering signal.

Then from other directions rose the sharp bark of a fox, the howl of a wolf, the scream of a panther, and the hoot of an owl.

There was a lull in the attack as these sounds issued through the night. By bitter experience the savages had learned their import.

"Glory!" exclaimed Seth, beside himself, "the Boy Brigade is near."

The savages resumed the attack on the cabin all the more furious. They cut and hacked away until suddenly a yell of agony from one of them caused the whole party to suspend operations.

Scarcely a minute had elapsed when another warrior tumbled into the water with a frightful scream of agony; and as no shot had been fired from the interior of the cabin, the savages knew that a new and silent enemy had appeared upon the scene of action. Silence was imposed upon the party, and all listened with bated breath. A savage advanced to the edge of the platform in front of the cabin, and leaning forward, peered down at the water. He caught the outlines of a black, spherical object lying upon the surface of the lake not ten feet from him; but before he could make his discovery known, the object raised slightly and thrust forward a long, slender rod with a sharp lance-point which entered his throat, completely severing the windpipe. A half-moan, half-cry, mingled with a horrible gurgling, gasping sound, followed, and the doomed red-skin went overboard into a watery grave.

Something of the truth now began to enter the wild brains of the over-triumphant warriors and it at once became necessary for them to act upon the defensive. They beat a hasty retreat from the vicinity of Neptune's cabin.

No sooner was their flight an assured fact, ere a shout of triumph went up from the water around the cabin; and a moment later five of the Boy Brigade climbed upon the cabin platform, where they were greeted by Sure Shot Seth and old Neptune.

"Boys," said Seth, "you have saved us. But we must get away from here; the enemy is too strong for us. The Brigade can't work when confined to one place."

"Yes; and the sooner you leave the better," said Gray, "for they are growing stronger all the time."

"My son," replied Neptune, "we are all ready to depart—in fact were making ashore for that purpose, when the red barbarians attacked us. I will proceed to launch my canoe at once."

In a few moments Neptune had launched his rubber boat alongside the platform and placed a few simple articles of food and clothing in them. Then the old man and his daughter, and Seth and Maggie bid farewell to the submarine hut and entered the boats. As the small boat would carry but one person, and the large one barely three, the old man took the former, and Seth and the two maidens the latter.

Justin Gray and his four companions led the way; Seth and his fair friends came next, while Neptune brought up the rear.

It was with no little difficulty that the leading boat was followed, owing to the darkness and the extreme silence observed by the members of the Brigade in handling their paddles. Seth, however, being once more in his element, with the responsibility of the two maidens' lives resting upon him, exerted every faculty to keep close behind his friends, and to guard against danger. It was this extra precautionary measure that enabled him to detect, when a few rods from shore, a black object creeping stealthily, at right angles toward them; and having assured himself that it was a canoe filled with enemies, he at once gave the signal of alarm. But it came too late. The enemy were upon them.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GONE!

"Pull for your lives! pull, boys! The demons are upon us!" cried Sure Shot Seth.

Neptune turned his canoe and started in pursuit of his friends. But all acted with such precipitous haste that in the darkness and confusion the three canoes became separated.

The red-skins pursued; and as the fates would have it, Seth and the maidens, the weakest party, became the victims of the chase. When about twenty rods from the shore they were overtaken and made prisoners despite Seth's heroic efforts.

No sooner had he discovered the inevitable capture of himself and the maidens, than he gave the Brigade's well-known cry of distress. From different quarters the answer came, and no doubt assistance; but before he could repeat the cry, a bandage was placed over his mouth; then all three were taken into a large canoe and hurried off across the lake. Ten minutes' rapid paddling brought them to the eastern shore, where all landed; and without a moment's hesitation, they hurried away through the deep, dark woods.

Seth's hands were tied at his back, while he was led

on by a cord round his neck like a haltered beast. Twice had he tripped, and not having the use of his hands to prevent falling, he went down, jerking the cord, that held him in the ranks, out of the red-skin's hand. Before he could rise, however, the warrior pounced upon him like a hawk and secured the rope. By watching his chances and taking the warrior off his guard, he thought, by making a sudden leap, he might be enabled to jerk away from the foe, and then, with a bound, gain the freedom of the woods under cover of the darkness.

Several miles, however, had been traversed ere this opportunity was afforded. Both the maidens, as well as himself, were nearly exhausted with their forced march. The surrounding circumstances were not favorable, but he resolved to make the attempt, so, summoning all his strength, he made the leap, springing abruptly to one side. The rope was jerked from the red-skin's hand, and Seth was free. One bound carried him beyond reach of the enemy's grasp; but at the next, the earth seemed to open before him, and the Boy Rifleman felt himself falling downward into unknown depths.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DROP SCENE.

A few miles east of Lake Luster was a valley opening upon the Minnesota river, known therabouts as the Deer-Drive Valley. The name belonged to the nomenclature of the West, and possessed an aptness in its application. At the river the valley was nearly a mile wide, with low bluffs; but as it receded into the woods it grew narrower, and the bluffs more precipitous—finally terminating in a rift or narrow gorge, with perpendicular walls of rocks. In years past, the Indians had used this valley for killing deer by driving them in at the river and then forcing them into the head or rather the neck of the valley from whence there was no escape alive. Hence the name, Deer-Drive Valley. Of late years, however, it had never been visited for this purpose; for, since the establishing of the Yellow Medicine Agency, most of the game had been driven out of the woods by the Indians and white hunters together; and as there was nothing in the rugged solitude of the valley to command even passing interest, it was seldom visited.

It was an admirable hiding-place, as long as one was not hunted there, and, conscious of this fact, three persons who have figured in our story heretofore, took advantage of it.

These three persons were Rube Johnson, Gus Stewart, and Ches Pagan, lately the followers of the notorious Ivan Le Clercq.

It will be remembered that we left those boys in the council with the Boy Chief on the margin of the Black Woods, which terminated in the death of Abe Thorne. Since that time they had been wanderers, as it were, upon the face of the earth. Their minds had become so terrified and excited that they started like guilty, conscience-stricken things at every sound. The stealthy steps of the administrators of justice could be heard, in imagination, at any moment. At length, grown tired and foot-sore from long wandering, they crept into the head of the Deer-Drive, and there hid themselves.

It is true, their leader in sin, Ivan Le Clercq, had offered them immunity in the Indian encampment, but this cold-blooded and cowardly assassination of Abe Thorne filled them with abject fear of him; and they fled from him and his followers as from all others. Everybody and everything they now regarded as enemies, and miserable, dejected, and backward-looking beings that they were, hiding and skulking from the vengeance of man, only to encounter that of God.

They had made a good selection of the many hiding-places offered them in the vicinity. They had encamped in the narrow neck of the Deer-Drive, where the walls were fully a hundred feet high and not over twenty feet apart. Over this rift nature had thrown a covering as wonderful and intricate as the gossamer web of the spider. From the facade of each perpendicular bluff, a multitude of parasitical vines had grown out, and from the very bottom had the rift grown full of these slender creepers. Years had lent their growth to those vines which had become interlaced and matted into a perfect net-work, into which no human eye could penetrate ten feet.

The young fugitives made their way through these vines to the very end of the chamber, or rift. There they found themselves in darkness; but a pine torch was readily procured, when with their knives, they set to work clearing a large space—crowding the severed branches and twigs back into the spongy mass. They cut the vines as high as they could reach, and when their task was completed they felt somewhat elated over the result. In the dim glow of the torch the surrounding walls all seemed of a solid mass, so evenly had the vines been cut. The ground beneath their feet was hard, gravelly and dry though a little stream found a source in a cool, limpid spring within five feet of their retreat.

Laying in a supply of venison and some pine fagots for fire, the trio felt that they would be safe for a few days, at least, in the Deer-Drive. They passed their time in lamenting the course they had pursued, and in pondering over the fate of their friends at the Agency.

It was night, and a dim, feeble light from a sputtering torch pervaded their novel retreat. The day had worn wearily by, and they found themselves there after two days' confinement, suffering the pangs of inactivity as well as of fear and terror.

"Boys," said Rube Johnson, "this layin' round in these holes is gittin' to be intolerable to me. I've either got to get out of here, else you'll have a dead rogue on your hands to bury."

"We'd all be better off dead," said Pagan, sadly.

"Yes; poor Abe Thorne is out of all this trouble," added Gus Stewart.

"Probably if we'd all not been cowards, and done as Abe resolved to do, we'd be happy to-night with our folks," said Rube; "but like the fools that we were, we didn't dare to oppose Ivan, and so here we are, sufferin' worse than if we'd gone boldly up and acknowledged our sin and received our punishment."

A silence now came over the unhappy trio. Not a sound was heard save the melancholy chirruping of a cricket, and the soft bubbling of the little spring near could be heard; and even these had become so monotonous to the fugitives that they seemed incorporated into the solemn stillness of the place.

Suddenly Rube Johnson sprang to his feet, a look of wild terror upon his face.

His companions followed his example.

The three exchanged startled glances—they seemed speechless. But their looks spoke plain enough.

A strange sound had burst suddenly upon their ears. It was the sound as of a heavy body crashing down through the tangled vines overhead.

"Boys!" cried Rube, "we have been discovered."

"And our enemies are trying to crush us by rollin' something down upon us. Oh, my God! when will this end?" cried young Stewart.

"I fear never," added Ches Pagan.

The sound of the falling body had ceased, as if arrested by the great web of vines; but it was soon resumed again. Down, down, crashing and tearing it came, nearer and nearer. It seemed to be bringing the whole mass of parasites with it. The boys saw the top of their retreat quiver and sway. The falling mass was near them; but so terrified were they that they stood as if rooted to the spot, gazing with distended eyes upward. And at length a pair of human feet, incased in moccasins, appeared through the logs above them. They were followed by a pair of legs clad in buckskin leggings. Slowly downward, as if twisting and struggling through the brushy mass, the body continued to descend until the feet touched the ground. Then the parasites, which clung to the head and shoulders of the intruder like leeches, let go and sprung back to their former position, trembling and rustling.

With speechless horror the fugitives gazed upon the stranger who stood with back toward them. His hands were tied at his back and his clothing torn and tattered. For a moment he stood as if bewildered by the dazzling torchlight, then he turned and faced the trio of terrified boys.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RENEGADES TO THE RESCUE!

"My Lord!" burst from Gus Stewart's lips.

"A ghost!" added Ches Pagan, shivering.

"The ghost of Sure Shot Seth," gasped Rube Johnson.

The trio shrunk back amazed and horrified.

A smile mounted the face of the ghost; its lips moved, and these words were plainly articulated:

"Boys, how's this?"

"It's him in the flesh and spirit," said Rube.

"It's for a fact, boys; but I thought I'd tumbled over into the fathomless pit," continued Sure Shot Seth, his mind relieved of a terrible load.

Rube, Gus and Ches drew a long breath of relief, straightened up and assumed a look more human and free of terror. They felt like new beings.

"We thought you were dead," said Rube.

"I know you did, boys; but I'm not. If you'll just free my hands back here, I'll tell you how I happened here," replied Seth, doubtful of their attitude toward him.

Rube took his knife and set the Boy Rifleman at liberty.

Seth's face and hands were terribly scratched and lacerated by the vines; but he paid no attention to these wounds, and having gazed around him in a sort of a doubt, he asked:

"Where the plague are we, anyhow?"

"In the head of Deer-Drive," answered Rube.

"Were you thrown over the precipice?" asked Rube.

"Why do you ask that question?" asked Seth.

"Your hands were bound."

"Yes; but the red-skins bound them, and in order to get away from them I jumped over the embankment; but I didn't know where I was goin' to till I was on my way. Fortunately, the vines broke the force of the fall, and let me down easy by jerks."

"Then there are red-skins about?"

"I left a party of six at the top of this rift. But you have nothing to fear of them, have you?"

"And why not?" questioned Rube.

"Your friend, Ivan Le Clercq, is their leader."

"We know it; but we have renounced him as a bad character; and believing you had been murdered, after trying you to that tree the other day, we have been hiding away through fear of punishment."

"Well, I wanted you to suffer in conscience for that mean caper; for Maggie Harris and Emma Milbank told me who you were, if you did wear masks. The girls set me at liberty, and a few minutes after the Indians came that way, and but for the girls I would now be dead."

"But that skeleton—"

"I tied a dead Indian up to the tree and the wolves helped me out with the deception," explained Seth, a smile mounting his face.

An exclamation of surprise and joy burst from the lips of the trio. Rube Johnson advanced toward Seth with outstretched hand and said:

"Seth, can you forgive me—all you forgive me?"

"With all my heart, Reuben, I forgive you," said Seth, taking the proffered hand; "for I feel certain that you have suffered in conscience for your conduct, and will profit by it."

"God only knows what we have suffered, Seth. Hell couldn't invent more excruciating tortures than we have undergone," Rube affirmed, stoutly.

Gus and Ches both advanced and asked the forgiveness of the young borderman; and when it had been granted, the souls of these three boys seemed metamorphosed into different beings. Instead of that lurid, haggard look, the joyful radiance of a cleansed soul beamed upon every lineament of the face; and the hollow, depressed sound of their voices changed into the clear, happy and metallic ring of youth. Sure Shot Seth had been a benefactor to them—a being of divine mercy.

"I hope, Seth," Johnson at length remarked, "that you'll press us into your service, so we can make up for our meanness toward you on the day of the shooting-match. I know you'd 'a' won the rifle if you'd 'a' got a shot against them fellers."

"I did win it," said Seth.

"Not that day; a stranger-lad callin' himself the Eaglet won it."

Seth indulged in a low pleasant laugh, then said:

"I was the Young Eaglet from Sky-Puncher-Peak."

"You," exclaimed the trio in amazement.

"Yes; Maggie Harris and Emma Milbank had overheard you plotting against me the day before the match; and so they had it all arranged as to how you were to be beaten. But poor Maggie! she is in the power of the savages again. They captured her, another maiden and myself last night, and we were marched off this way—"

"Then the girls and their captors are near here?"

"When I left them, they were at the top of this rift."

"Then the red-skins 'll be apt to be lookin' after you."

"Yes; and I presume the sooner I get out of here, the better it'll be for me."

"Then come along," said Rube, taking up his rifle and entering the dense canopy of foliage.

The four made their way out of the thicket and passing down the valley, climbed the bank and set off in search of the savages.

The three boys were well armed with rifles and revolvers, and furnished Seth with an outfit. They crept back to the head of the valley where he had escaped from the red-skins, expecting to find the latter somewhere about. But in this they were disappointed. No trace of them was to be found.

As the savages would be compelled to cross the Minnesota in order to reach their stronghold, Seth supposed, from the course taken after leaving the lake, that they were aiming for what was known as Pagan's Ferry, where a number of boats were usually to be found. Acting upon this supposition, he and his new-made friends set off for that point. They traveled rapidly, to make up time lost and to get in ahead of the savages at the river. But in this they were disappointed. The red-skins had preceded them to the ford by several minutes; and had just embarked with the captives, in a flat-boat belonging to the ferry, for the opposite shore as they came up.

"Too late!" exclaimed Seth, his voice full of bitter disappointment as he looked upon the expanse of water that separated them from the enemy.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE TOUCH OF A CLAMMY HAND.

Seth, though greatly disappointed at being thus preceded to the ford, did not despair.

No sooner had he discovered the embarkation of the enemy than he forthwith devised a new course of action; and was about to begin its execution when he discovered a second canoe, containing two warriors, coming down the river.

This again interrupted his movements, and he and his three companions would be compelled to remain in concealment until the boat had passed. Unluckily the two warriors intercepted those with the captives near the middle of the river, when both parties came to a halt and entered into a conversation, which, at times, was inaudible, then loud and boisterous. Finally, to the bitter surprise and regret of the boys, they saw the two warriors mount the flat boat and haul their canoe on board after them; while the craft turned slowly down the river.

"What can that movement mean?" asked Rube Johnson, puzzled by the red-skins' change of course.

"I don't know exactly," replied Seth, "though I assure you it is nothing good. They may intend to land at the bend below, in order to conceal their trail. Let us follow along the bank and watch. I don't intend they shall escape by such a dodge."

So saying, the quartette crept stealthily along the wooded shore, keeping in sight of the drifting flat-boat, but taking good care not to expose themselves.

A sharp wind blowing down the river served as an extra motor to the craft, and compelled the boys to move briskly. And, to make the pursuit still more difficult, the moon was hidden half the time behind banks of drifting clouds and stately pines. The bend, where they expected the enemy to land, was at length reached; but to still add to their surprise, the boat continued on down the stream.

"That's queer," said Rube, "that they should travel toward the Agency."

"To me it is terribly portentous," remarked Seth.

"Why so?"

"I am afraid the Agency has been captured; nothing else would take the savages down the river. The two in the canoe acquainted those with the captives of the fact; whereupon, all turned in the direction of the Agency. Old Little Crow and his followers have been to the Yellow Medicine what Hawk-Eyes has been to Lake Luster. But several miles separate us from the post yet, admitting that such is the case, we must act—"

ingly, and never let those girls get into deeper danger. We must rescue them."

"Suggest your plans," said Rube, "and we will do all in our power to help you."

They moved on down the stream, keeping the flat-boat just in sight and themselves well under cover. As much as two miles had been thus traversed, and they were fast nearing the Yellow Medicine, where, if the Agency had fallen, all hopes would be lost.

Further delay was dangerous.

"We must do something, boys," Seth declared; "we'll have to meet an opportunity half-way this time. I already have an idea in my head. Do you see an object floating on the water a few rods in advance of the flat-boat yonder?"

"Yes; I noticed that some time ago; what is it?" asked Rube Johnson, gazing at the object.

"A canoe, or a skiff, floating bottom up—nothing more. It is doubtless one of those that belong to the ferry, and has been turned loose by red-skins and sent adrift. I am going to utilize it. I believe that I can swim out and get under that canoe; then if you fellows can follow me, one at a time, we will float alongside the raft and board it."

"We can follow you, Seth; but we can't take any firearms," said Rube.

"No, our knives will be all we can take; but if we surprise the savages we will have no trouble in getting possession of the raft."

"Lead out and we will follow," said Gus, eagerly. They hurried on down the river, when a bend in the course of the stream threw its entire width under the shadows of the stately pines that guarded the shore. Here was the point selected to initiate Seth's plans; and divesting himself of his superfluous clothing, he entered the water. Throwing himself upon his back, he swam with scarcely an effort, out in the river ere he found that the inverted canoe had floated into the shadows of the bend, while close behind came the flat-boat.

Putting himself into such a position as to counteract the force of the current, he waited until the canoe came up. Then, "ducking," his head under the water, he came up under the craft. An inspection of his covert showed that the sides of the canoe, or rather the gunwale, were surrounded by a narrow box-rim which had been intended as a seat, and which now greatly facilitated the buoyancy of the floating craft. There was plenty room under it for half a dozen persons. The ventilation was good; and both fore and aft was a little hole through which he could see a faint rift of light. He had taken his position near the forward end, and, by placing his hand upon the side, was enabled to float along with the boat quite easily.

The wind was still blowing, and at intervals a wave would dash over or against the craft, causing it to toss and rock. It was pitchy dark under the boat, and the swimmer had begun to cogitate over the further execution of his plans when something touched his legs under the water. His first thought was that one of the boys had followed him and was then outside; but this was soon dispelled when a cold, dripping hand came in contact with his face.

Mechanically he threw up his disengaged hand. It came in contact with a stiff and rigid human arm. "My God!" burst in horror from his lips; "death is here with me! a lifeless human creature is my companion!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WHAT WERE THEY DOING THERE?

SURE SHOT SETH felt a chill of repulsive horror pass through his form when he realized that he was shut up under the canoe with a dead person. His first impulse was to leave the dread, dark place; but before he could do so he heard a voice say:

"Divil take the spalpeen!"

The words were audible enough, yet spoken so low that Seth could not recognize the tone nor accent. But he was assured of one thing; if there was a dead man under the canoe, a living one was also there; and thinking that it might be one of his friends who had come there unknown to him, he said:

"Who are you?"

"And it's none ave your business," was the prompt reply, spoken with the unmistakable Celtic brogue.

"I'll make it my business," replied Seth, "if you don't answer me. Now, sir, who are you?"

"And be the Howly Moses! and yer v ce sounds familiar," responded the unknown, speaking louder and in an easier tone.

"By heavens! It's Teddy O'Roop!"

"And sure is it, Mither Seth," responded the Irishman.

"Why, boy, the Brigade has mourned you as dead!" answered Seth, completely astonished.

"And it's meself that mourned my death, too, but, by the love of the Virgin, mees come out all right side up. The red spalpeens knocked the sinces outen me head, and then toted mees off away up here a captive. But mees couldn't sthand it, and so mees ups and knocks a couple ave the bucks stiff, and away mees run, and run till mees reached the river. Then it was dark, and foinding this boat mees tipped her over, got in and set sail down the stream."

"Do you know a dozen Indians are close behind you?" questioned Seth.

"Divil the bit does mees know it."

"Well there is; and they have Maggie Harris and Vishnia, the Maid of the Valley, in their power."

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed the young Celt; "and whyfore are the varmint going down-stream?"

"I am afraid the Agency has fallen into Little Crow's hands, and they are going there."

"Och! and would that an *ave-Mary* would exorminate old Little Crow and his crew, and mees would put forth all me soul in the prayer."

"The Lord has been with us through all our troubles and trials of the past week; and, rest as-

sured, He will not desert us in the end," replied Seth, feeling that the mercy of a Higher Power watched over them.

"And what brought yees here, Sith, me b'y?"

"I came here in hopes of getting aboard that flat-boat."

"And gitting scalped? What could yees do alone, now?"

"Three others will be here to join me soon."

"Three of the b'ys?"

"Yes; but of Ivan Le Clercq's band. They found out that I was alive and forthwith enlisted under our banner. I left them a few minutes ago."

"Do say, now!" exclaimed Teddy; "wirrah! and what next have you to tell me, Sith?"

"A great deal; but I have not the time now. Isn't that a light shining on the water, back of you, Teddy?"

Teddy glanced out at the hole he had cut in the end of the boat, and, sure enough, saw a faint light streaming across the water. It shone from the deck of the flat-boat. The savages had lit a pine torch and fixed it to an upright post in the center of the boat.

"That may interfere, somewhat, with my plans," said Seth, uneasily; "if those boys, however, would come now we might strike whenever the raft floats alongside of us. It seems to me they have had time to reach here."

"Sith, and do you think them b'ys 'll do to tie to?" questioned Teddy, manifesting some doubt.

"I believe they will not betray me, nor deceive me in their pretended friendship. They freely admitted their wrong-doings, and begged my forgiveness for what they had done to me."

"They may be all right, but, seeing as they war on't mean, it makes me juberous of them," exclaimed Ted, glancing out through the aperture at the flat-boat, which was nearly alongside of them; "just change position and look on board of that boat."

Seth changed position with Teddy, and looking out, he was started with surprise and bitter disappointment to see, within the glare of the light on board the flat-boat, the forms of Rube Johnson, Gus Stewart and Ches Pagan among those of the savages. They were enjoying the freedom of the boat, and engaged in conversation with the foe, as unconcerned as you please. Maggie and Vishnia stood at one side of the boat, locked in each other's arms, downcast and sad.

"Oh, curse the folly that ever led me to trust those boys!" cried Seth, in the bitterest tones of regret.

"Och! and they're the divil's own brats."

"We'd better be getting out of here," said Seth, "for if they are traitors, they will not let me escape—good heavens!—some one overboard!"

"Holy Mother! it's one av the girls!"

These exclamations were occasioned by a wild scream and splash in the river.

Glancing out, Seth beheld Vishnia struggling in the waves; and simultaneously with this discovery, the crash of firearms on board the boat burst through the night—wild, startling and terrible.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE RIVER GANTLET.

THE flat-boat was alongside the floating canoe.

Vishnia was struggling in the waves close to it; and without a moment's hesitation, or a thought of his own danger, Seth forced the canoe toward her. He soon felt her clinging and struggling at the side of the craft, and reaching out under the edge of the boat, he grasped her by the arm and drew her under the water into the canoe.

Half strangled, she now lay upon the youth's arm, making it difficult for him to keep himself and burden above the water. But Teddy coming to his assistance, the maiden soon recovered from her submersion, and although still in the water to her arm-pits, became pacified by the assuring words of her rescuer whose voice she recognized.

By this time the report of firearms had ceased aboard the flat-boat, and in loud and anxious tones a voice was shouting:

"Seth; ho, Seth!"

It was the voice of Rube Johnson.

Something of the truth flashed through the young rifleman's brain, and he felt ashamed of himself.

"Teddy," he exclaimed, "help me remove this canoe from over us. Those boys have captured the flat-boat."

In an instant the canoe had been turned over and the heads of Seth, Teddy and Vishnia uncovered. They clung to the sides of the boat until the raft came up and they were taken aboard.

A shout of triumph pealed from the lips of Rube, Gus and Ches, and was answered, though feebly, by Seth and Teddy. Maggie rushed forward, and with tears of joy in her eyes, received Seth and Vishnia aboard the raft; and for a moment the wildest excitement prevailed.

Three or four dead savages lying at the further extremity of the boat told what the wrongfully-mistrusted boys had been about.

"Boys," said Seth, "how is this? Why did you reverse my plans?"

"Couldn't help it, Seth," answered Rube. "We found a canoe soon after you left us; and having remembered that Ivan Le Clercq had offered us our choice of joining the Indians or becoming outcasts, we resolved to avail ourselves of what he told us. He gave us our own time to think the matter over, and in case we concluded to join the red-skins, he gave us certain secret signs which would admit us as friends into the Indian ranks. Well, we jumped into the canoe, paddled over to this boat, gave our signs when discovered, and were taken aboard. We pretended friendship, and, by and by, succeeded in making them believe that a small party of enemies were on the east side, and got half of

them out in search of the foe. When they were out of reach, we seized our rifles and attacked the others with the result already seen."

"Vishnia," said Maggie, "why did you jump overboard?"

"I saw them seize their weapons and thought they were going to murder us all," replied Vishnia, shivering in her wet clothing. "I am really ashamed of myself, but I couldn't help it."

"Well, we are right so far, but there is no telling how long we will remain so," said Seth; "those red-skins that went ashore will be apt to look after us; and I am sorry to say we are not entirely beyond rifle range of either shore."

"Very true, Seth," responded Rube. "But I see you were not alone under that canoe."

"No; I found my friend, Teddy O'Roop, tucked away under there, snug as a muskrat in his den."

Without further delay, the boys proceeded to put the boat in a more secure condition for its crew. This was effected by removing several deck-planks and opening a way into the hold, which, although not over three feet deep, furnished a shelter from savage bullets. Maggie and Vishnia, and three of the boys, took refuge therein, while the other two boys, lying flat upon the deck, kept a close watch upon all sides.

The boat following the main current of the stream, kept in the middle of the channel without any effort from the occupants. It moved slowly, though harassed by the wind and waves.

One thing of importance had Rube and his friends learned of the red-skins while on the boat: Yellow Medicine Agency had been evacuated and the soldiers and settlers had retreated in the direction of Fort Ridgely, situated on the river several miles below. The fort and all the houses and appurtenances thereto had been destroyed; while the whole of the Sioux tribe, with their families, had been concentrated upon, and in the vicinity of the ruins.

This discovery of the situation increased Seth's alarm. They were then within a mile or two of the Agency, and to run the gantlet of the enemy there would be impossible. He knew the news of their coming would precede them to the mouth of the Yellow Medicine and that the enemy would leave nothing undone to entrap them. To leave the boat before reaching that point would be attended with great danger also; and what course to pursue to avert a deadly peril became a question of great moment. It was finally agreed, however, with Maggie and Vishnia concurring, to keep the boat and run the gantlet at the Agency.

With this in view, all prepared for the terrible ordeal. Seth was not inclined to trust entirely to chance, and at once set about making some arrangements for escape, should they be attacked. With an Indian tomahawk he cut a hole, about two feet square, in the side of the boat between the deck and water-line; and within reach of this he had one of the Indian canoes placed. Then all the planks but one were replaced over the hole, and his arrangements were completed.

Lights on the river-bank among the ruins of the Yellow Medicine Agency soon appeared in sight; and the wild, fearful sounds of a war-dance rung hideously through the night.

The sounds of this midnight orgie gave Sure Shot Seth some relief, although there was a horrible meaning in the demoniac revelry. He knew by it that the savages were so occupied in celebrating some bloody victory that they would be likely to overlook all measures of precaution, and thereby enable them to slip by unnoticed.

Silently the boat continued to drift onward. Not a word above a whisper was spoken by the inmates.

Finally, to the great fear of all, Seth discovered a dusky sentinel seated upon the shore, looking out over the river. He was plainly outlined against the sky, now lit up with the glow of the Indians' camp-fire, several rods back from the river.

"By heavens!" cried our hero, "I am afraid we will never get past without that sentinel seeing us."

"Say the word, and he's a dead inginer," responded Teddy, springing to his feet.

"I am afraid it would be rather hazardous to attempt to remove him," Seth answered.

"I'll try him, anyhow," answered the fearless young Celt, and he began preparing for action.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN IRISH BOY'S EXPLOITS.

DIVESTING himself of his coat, hat, and shoes, Teddy crept out of the hole in the side of the craft, and dropped noiselessly into the water. The next moment he was gliding away, with nothing but his face exposed, swimming rapidly, and as silent as a floating object, toward the west shore. He moved obliquely across the stream and finally reached the shore, about fifty yards above the sentinel. He crept out under the shelving bank and glanced back over the water. He was startled by the distinctness with which he could see the flat-boat in the glare of the Indian fires. It was already opposite him, and discovery seemed inevitable; however, he resolved to lose no opportunity in behalf of his friends, and began creeping along under the bank toward the sentinel. He soon came to a passage leading down to a sort of landing, where three or four canoes were tied up. To weaken the enemy's little fleet, he cut the painter of each boat and permitted it to float away. Then he ascended the bank and peered carefully around him. He saw the sentinel still at his post, gazing out over the stream with a stoical silence, while two other warriors were approaching from the direction of the camp.

Fierce and deafening rose the yells of the red revelers dancing around the fire a few rods away.

Teddy again glanced over the river. The flat-boat was almost opposite the sentinel. The latter had

only to bend his eyes slightly to see it. The Irish lad took in the situation at a glance. He believed that even the death of the sentinel would not save the boat from detection. The youth resolved upon a desperate stroke. He rose to his feet, and uttering a sharp war-whoop, well-known to the red-skins, darted away toward the scene of Indian revelry.

The sentinel sprang to his feet and discharged his rifle at the daring enemy.

The two warriors approaching uttered a war-cry and started in pursuit of him.

The alarm was at once sounded through the camp, and, like a stream of water bursting from its banks, the dancing horde dissolved and went streaming away in pursuit of the daring enemy.

Teddy bent his course to the north when he saw he had drawn the attention of the whole camp; and with the agility of a cat and endurance of the wind, he sped away across the clearing. He found it no difficulty to keep beyond reach of his enemies.

The red-skins are naturally swift runners, but Teddy O'Roop was without a peer in the North-west; and it was this assurance of superior speed that led to such a fearless expedient to save his friends. It was not his desire to throw his enemy off his trail until assured that the boat had passed all danger.

The whole of the clearing was lit up with the glow of the fires, and while the river guarded the eastern extremity of the camp grounds, and prevented the fugitive's escape in that direction, the surrounding forest offered him a safe retreat. Aware of this fact, the Indians endeavored to cut him off from the woods, and Teddy permitted them to indulge in strong hopes of his capture. He manifested signs of falling strength, and ran on in a zig-zag course—the long stream of pursuers stretching out behind like the tail of a comet—bending and winding over the ridges and depressions, and along his reeling course, like the form of a night serpent.

Teddy liked this wild sport. There was a sort of fascination about it that he enjoyed; and he regretted that none of his companions were present to witness the grand chase. He felt a sense of delight at the excitement of which he was the author—that he, a mere boy, was the sole object which swayed the wild horde behind him—that turned and directed their course.

He ran on until he had reached the woods, into which he plunged, with the red-skins close behind. Here the darkness was deep—rendered all the more intense by coming so suddenly out of the glare of the lights. But the Indians, spreading out, hoped to cover the trail of the fugitive and drive him into the river a short way ahead, where the stream made an abrupt bend. But, Teddy was not to be caught thus. He knew that the river swept around in front of him, and no sooner did he get well in under the shadows ere he stopped short and pressed himself close up against a huge tree trunk.

This *coup de main* worked admirably. The savages neither saw him dodge behind the tree nor missed his footfalls before them; but ran on past him. It was fully five minutes before the rear of the pursuing column had gone by; and even then he could hear some stragglers crashing on with heavy footsteps through the brush. Of the latter, however, he had no fear, and stepping from his concealment he started back toward the Indian encampment. Before he had gone far he heard a savage approaching, and dropping flat upon the ground, he waited. The red-skin came on, stumbled over the prostrate boy, and fell. Before he could rise, Teddy was upon him, and with one or two well-directed blows with his knife, silenced the Indian's lips forever.

Teddy took the blanket from the dead warrior's shoulders, threw it around his own, and sauntered on until he had reached the margin of the woods. Here he stopped and glanced out into the opening. He saw a few warriors scattered over the clearing, all slowly retracing their footsteps to camp. The spirit of adventure again took possession of him, and drawing the blanket closer about him he entered the opening and started leisurely down toward the Indian encampment, keeping a careful watch around him, and imitating the walk of a red-skin. He drew the blanket close about his head and face, and kept aloof from the returning stragglers.

Straight toward the encampment he made his way. As he approached it, he saw that a number of warriors were there yet; still he was not disconcerted by the discovery and moved on. He soon found himself inside the camp, and the full glare of the fire, where it became necessary to use great precaution. He approached within a few rods of the main party, and having assured himself that no prisoners were there, turned and moved leisurely away toward the south. But this movement did not escape the notice of the Indians, and a couple of warriors advanced toward him, their curiosity aroused.

Disguise being no longer of avail, Teddy threw aside his blanket, uttered a shout of defiance and darted away like a deer.

The savages were completely astounded by this impudence of the young pale-face; and while a few gave chase, others set up a howl of alarm to draw the others back that had gone north.

The second chase was brief as it was exciting. The woods being nearer, Teddy soon gained its cover and eluded his pursuers. The lad felt certain that those on board the boat had had sufficient time to pass all danger; and so he at once set out to reach them.

In a few minutes he struck the river about a mile below the Agency; but now the question arose in his mind—were his friends above or below him? His inability to satisfy himself on this point left him in a state of great anxiety. He sat down to rest. He knew the boat could not be far away if above him, and to make sure that he did not miss his friends, he concluded to wait.

An hour passed and no boat came. This convinced

him that it had passed before he came, and rising, he moved rapidly away, down-stream. He had traveled about two miles when, to his delight, he came in sight of the flat-boat. It was floating leisurely along, though no sign of life was visible upon it. This, however, gave him no uneasiness, for he supposed all were concealed in the hold, and getting in ahead of the craft, he plunged into the river and swam out to intercept it.

When alongside the boat he halted, but received no answer. He climbed in at the hole cut in the side. All was silent as the tomb. He called upon Seth; but no answer. The boat was deserted!

Teddy now climbed out upon the deck, and as he did so, his foot slipped in something wet, on the plank. He bent his eyes downward and saw that it was a pool of coagulated blood. A cry burst from the lad's lips, and a sense of fear crept over him when he beheld the signs of a bloody conflict on the deck. It told him that, despite his efforts in their behalf, his friends had been attacked, and all, no doubt, killed or captured.

What course he should now pursue was beyond his power to determine, and while he stood meditating over the matter a slight sound behind him arrested his attention. Turning, he was startled with horror to see two savages leap out of the hold and start toward him.

With a bound he reached the end of the boat, then plunged off into the river and disappeared from the lynx eyes of the astounded red-skins, beneath the waves.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A DOUBLE DODGE.

We will now look after Sure Shot Seth and his party. After Teddy left them above the ruined Agency they waited, with burning anxiety, the result of his adventure; and when the yells of the savages convulsed the night, and they saw the sentinel leave his post, they knew that Teddy had been discovered, and that the whole tribe was in pursuit of him. Their fears of his capture were great, but they could render him no assistance.

They had floated past the point of danger, and were once more under the cover of darkness. They congratulated themselves upon their escape, but, in the midst of their rejoicing, Sure Shot suddenly discovered a bateau filled with warriors, glide out from the shore toward the boat, and rejoicing was changed to terror.

"Girls," said Seth, "get out into the canoe, and perhaps you can steal away unseen in the darkness."

"But you, Seth, what?"

"Never mind us, Maggie; we will remain here and engage the foe, and take our chances."

The crack of a rifle rung suddenly through the night. Rube Johnson raising his head and shoulders through the opening on deck, had fired upon the advancing foe. And then Gus Stewart and Ches Pagan followed his example with fatal result to two red-skins. But it made their companions all the more furious and determined; and pushing on they soon reached the side of the boat and boarded it.

Meanwhile, Maggie and Vishnia had, with Seth's assistance, climbed out through the hole in the side of the craft, made for just such an emergency, into the canoe. They were concealed from the eyes of the enemy by the projecting ends of the deck-plank; and as Seth placed a paddle in each one's hands and unloosed the boat, he said:

"Now work with all your might, girls; and keep down the river. If we escape, we will follow you; but if we never—"

"May Heaven aid you, Seth," Maggie broke in, her voice half-choked with emotion.

The next moment the canoe glided away. Both of the maidens were skilled in the use of the paddle, and summoning all their strength they plied the slender blades with energy.

The red-skins were too deeply engaged at this moment to notice them. At the opening on the deck a deadly strife was going on. The savages, ten in number, were endeavoring to force an entrance to the hold, while the three boys, Seth's companions, held them at bay with rifles and pistols skillfully handled. The latter possessed a great advantage over the foe. Being in darkness the enemy were unable to direct their aim with any degree of accuracy.

Thus the conflict continued until half the savages were slain, when they, considering discretion the better part of valor, withdrew to the lower end of the boat where the boys could not get at them. Here they waited in hopes the pale-faces would come out of their defense; but an hour's patient watching convinced them that their enemies would hazard no chances in an open air fight, and so they resolved to adopt other means to dislodge them.

With their tomahawks they prised a wide plank up at the end of the boat, then, through the opening thus made, dropped themselves into the hold.

For a moment a deep, unnatural silence reigned within the black, dismal place; but it was broken by the savages creeping along on all fours toward the boys.

It was not the latter's desire to engage the foe in a hand-to-hand encounter; and to avert such a conflict they must act with decision. So, at a given signal from Sure Shot, the four youths sprang out upon the deck; then running to the side of the boat, they leaped down into the savages' bateau, cut the rope that fastened it to the raft, seized the oars and pulled away across the river.

So swift and uninterrupted was this movement made that the brave lads succeeded in getting three rods from the raft before the savages could conceive what was up, and get out upon the deck.

A yell of baffled triumph burst from the lungs of the outwitted red-skins and was answered by a

shout of derision from the lips of the quartette which was now beyond immediate danger.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Rube Johnson, "that was a lucky exchange of boats and positions for us, Sure Shot."

"Very," rejoined their leader; "and it will enable us to follow the girls on the river, and, consequently, run no risks of passing them, as we might otherwise do. If Teddy O'Roop was only safe with us, I would feel that we had won glory enough for one campaign. But, I shall not worry about him until I know I have cause. Teddy is a brave fellow; and while he is the luckiest mortal I ever saw, he can outwit a red-skin, or white-skin, too, for that matter, as easy as he can sight a rifle."

Dismissing all fears from their minds, the four lads turned their attention to the journey before them. The bateau being provided with several pairs of oars, each and all were enabled to take a hand at rowing. This gave them great speed, and as mile after mile was traversed, it finally occurred to them that they ought to have overtaken Maggie and Vishnia in that distance. They thought it impossible for them to have journeyed so far and rapidly, weak and exhausted as they must have been.

As it was almost daylight, however, they concluded to keep on down the river, and if they did not come up with the girls, or gain some clew as to their whereabouts by early dawn, they would turn back up the stream in search of them.

The red beams of dawn that had so long quivered in livid bars along the eastern sky, finally burst into flame; and the light of another day was upon them. Going ashore, they succeeded in killing some large fat fox squirrels, which were dressed, roasted and served for breakfast. This meager repast served to invigorate their worn bodies and revive their spirits.

After an hour's rest they again took to the bateau and started back up the Minnesota.

They had journeyed against the current but a short distance when the sight of an empty canoe floating on the river arrested their attention and filled their breasts with the gravest fears. They recognised it at a glance as the identical canoe in which Maggie and Vishnia had left the flat-boat. They intercepted and examined it to make certain that they were right. They identified it beyond a question; but there were no signs of violence about it. The paddles were both gone, and how and under what circumstances it had been deserted by the maidens was a question beyond their comprehension.

"Oh, if this canoe could only speak!" cried Seth, in the anguish of despair.

"If it could perhaps it would tell a tale that to us would be better untold."

"Very true, Rube; but it does seem as though the fates are against those two innocent, feeble girls. But then I shall never stop short of the very heart of the Indian stronghold until I know where they are."

"Count on us following wherever you dare lead, Seth," answered young Stewart.

With heavy hearts they pushed cautiously on up the river while the happy, twittering birds seemed to mock their misery with their joyous songs and merry-making among the green-robed trees.

In the midst of the many sounds that rose on the breath of the bright, rosy morning there suddenly arose a low, prolonged whistle, such as might issue from human lips.

It emanated from the western shore, and turning their eyes in that direction the boys beheld a bare head and white face peering from a clump of bushes on the bank.

"Who can it be?" questioned Seth, unable to recognize the queer-looking visage.

As if in answer to his question, the unknown stepped from the clump of shrubbery, and, with a wave of the hand, shouted aloud:

"Good-morning, me hearties!"

"Teddy O'Roop!" burst from Sure Shot's lips, as he headed the bateau toward the shore.

It was the Irish boy, true enough; and he was not alone. As soon as he hailed the boat, a young man, in the uniform of a captain of United States troops, appeared on the bank at his side.

CHAPTER XL.

WHERE WERE THE MAIDENS?

SKILLED in using the paddle, favored by a strong current and light canoe, Maggie and Vishnia glided rapidly away from the side of the flat-boat and soon found themselves some distance down the river. But they were not beyond the dreadful sounds of battle behind, and their very souls trembled with fear. Mentally they prayed for the success of their friends; eagerly they listened for some sound indicative of their triumph.

Not until all sounds of the conflict had ceased could they find courage to speak. Then Maggie was the first to break the awful silence that weighed like the presence of death upon them.

"The battle has ended," she said, solemnly.

"Yes; but it leaves us in a terrible suspense. We know not who have won," answered the fair Vishnia.

"Let us hope and pray for the best," Maggie bravely responded. "I think the boys had some advantage of their foes in position, and rest assured they have made good use of it, even though the odds were against them."

"My dear friend Maggie," sighed Vishnia, "I have lived and prayed for the best so long that my strength and hopes have all nearly deserted me. One peril after another follows in such rapid succession, even when success seems the most promising, that I am growing despondent and sick at heart."

"Don't give up yet, Vishnia," entreated the brave

little Maggie: "this may be our last part; a task we will find friends are long."

"A week ago, Maggie, I know no fear; but that was before the Indian outbreak, and when all one had to fear was the wild beast of the woods. The Indians were our best friends and daily companions; and no one could ever have convinced me that they would be the treacherous enemies they are. Father and I often visited their village, where we were received and entertained as distinguished guests. They gave us many valuable presents and seemed to vie with each other in doing us honor. They offered us a home in their village, and, in case we accepted, to confer upon me the royal dignity of queen. For hours have they sat and listened to me play upon the guitar, their very souls, apparently, charmed by the music. So kind and devoted did they seem to us that I never dreamed of their turning against us. Even since the outbreak have they obeyed a request of mine, though it is a wonder they did not kill me instead. It was on the night the Boy Brigade was attacked on Rock Island. We heard the din of battle away over at Lake Luster; and when we learned from a messenger, who was on his way to the tribe for reinforcements, that a conflict was going on between the Indians and whites, father and I set out for that point. We didn't know at the time that a war had begun, and supposed it was merely a personal affair between the two parties. However, I took my guitar; and, in order to reach the island, father took a small rubber canoe. Our object in going was that of peace. We felt in hopes we could bring about an adjustment of their troubles; and when I tell you, Maggie, that I paddled over to that island and took a position between the combatants, at the very muzzles of their guns, and there played my instrument, you may know my courage is fast failing. But then I accomplished my object, and induced the red-skins to withdraw from the island, and thus the conflict terminated. But the war has not, and all the influence I possessed over the savages vanished in a day; and father and I became hunted as enemies as we had once been honored as friends."

"You were brave, Vishnia, to risk your life on the island."

"I would not do so again, knowing what I do of Indian treachery and vengeance."

"I have often wondered to myself, since I first met you, why it was that you and your father ever took up your abode in such a lonely and obscure place as Lake Luster. I know you have been accustomed to good society, and have had the advantages of intellectual culture as well as of the comforts of wealth."

"That is it exactly, Maggie; my father is a wealthy man and a great student of nature and science. After mother's death, three years ago, he shut himself up with his books and sorrow, and studied and brooded over them until his mind was well-nigh overwrought. It became evident that he was killing himself by degrees—that his once powerful intellect was yielding to the pressure upon it. Our physician recommended travel and a change of climate for recreation. Acting upon this advice, he traveled in the north-west one summer during which time he found Lake Luster. But, while he was benefited by his travels, he was far from being restored to health; and having conceived an admiration for the life of a frontiersman, he concluded to spend a year or two in Minnesota. So he made up a party consisting of himself, myself and three gentlemen friends. The latter are, at present, gone to St. Paul for supplies. They were to have been back in two weeks from time of leaving."

"Father having some queer notions about submarine navigation, thought it a good time to perfect an invention that he had conjured up in his mind, years ago, and being an ingenious mechanic, he, with the assistance of his companions, erected the floating cabin in which we have lived ever since. To it he applied some of his ideas of a submarine vessel, and had he not been disturbed by the red-skins, he would soon have completed his invention. His theory of propulsion he was demonstrating on a small scale by a series of clock-works applied to the torpedoes which you saw placed in the water."

"We managed to keep our presence on Lake Luster a secret from all but the Indians, better than we had anticipated; and had it not been for this Indian war, there is no telling how long we could have remained there unknown at the Agency. Father has quite regained his usual health and strength, and we liked our romantic home so well that we had concluded to spend another season there; and next summer a young lady friend of mine was to have joined us with her father. I have been living in hopes of a pleasant time with her on Lake Luster; but alas! all is now gone, and for all I know, my poor old father may be dead—a victim of the treacherous Indians."

Here Vishnia choked with emotion.

"Don't borrow trouble, Vishnia," Maggie said, encouragingly; "I might say, and truthfully too, that, for all I know, my friends are all massacred; but I don't want to think so, for trouble is sure to come to us without our going to meet it, and I want to husband my courage for it when it does come."

"Maggie, you are a dear, brave girl, and I actually feel safer in your presence," answered Vishnia.

"I am glad of it, Vishnia; and if we are patient awhile longer, I think we'll be out of danger."

"What point will we strike below here where we would be likely to find friends, Maggie?"

"Fort Ridgely, I think, is the nearest point of safety; but I feel in strong hopes of meeting with friends before we reach there," Maggie answered.

"Yes, I should think the boys would soon come up with us if they escaped the Indians. At any rate, it

is growing light in the east; and daylight will be a welcome blessing to me; for the shadows seem full of lurking danger. Oh, Maggie! just think what a night we have passed!"

"It has been an awful one," replied Maggie; and here a silence fell upon the maidens and continued for some length of time.

Both plied their paddles with their utmost energy. At length day dawned, and the sun rose bright and warm above the tree-tops, infusing new life and vigor into the delicate forms of the maidens. The birds warbled their morning carols, and the great trees shook the pearly dew-drops from their emerald robes. The woods were "wakened by the soft, weird melody of nature's diurnal song, while the river and its wood-bound shores, overhung by white ethereal mist, seemed like the picturesque vision of a vague dream."

As their spirits revived under the magical influence of day, all the buoyancy of their young hearts returned. Their eyes assumed their old sparkle, and their cheeks their wonted hue. They forgot the dangers of the past in the joy of the present, and the lips which through the long, dismal night were mute with terror, were now wreathed in smiles.

The loud dip of a paddle suddenly broke the spell that the rosy morn had thrown around them.

Both started with a little cry of terror as they glanced around them.

Out from under cover of a bunch of reeds—into the river toward them they saw a canoe with three savage occupants glide.

Vishnia's paddle dropped from a nerveless hand, while Maggie sat motionless with a new-born terror in possession of her very soul.

The savages paddled alongside of them, and without the least resistance or scarcely a word expressive of terror from the girls, took them captives and transferred them to their own canoe.

When they had recovered somewhat from their sudden shock of terror, and had fully comprehended their situation, Maggie cried out:

"Oh, Vishnia! what a delusion—what a mockery has the beauties of this morning been to us!"

Vishnia could answer her only in hysterical sobs. The savages were delighted with their captives, whose passive demeanor seemed to imply indifference to their fate; but they knew not that their silence came of the despondency that loss of all hope brings.

Having seated themselves, the red-skins turned their boat up-stream, and with measured strokes began stemming the current.

There was an abrupt bend in the stream just above them, and as they approached this, an exclamation burst from one of the warriors' lips. The other two ceased paddling and with distended eyes searched the waters before them.

The captives saw that they were alarmed, and when they, also, looked up the river and discovered a number of waves chasing each other from around the bend they took courage; for the conviction that friends were approaching was intuitively forced upon them.

One of the warriors finally addressed his companions in a quick, hurried tone, and in his own dialect, which the captives were unable to understand. But the expression of his face and the violence of his gestures were plainly indicative of excitement. As further evidence of this fact, they at once headed toward the eastern shore and ran in behind a little clump of reeds where no human eye upon the river could penetrate, yet from whence a fair view of the stream could be had.

Something of the truth now passed through the minds of the captives, and they exchanged expressive glances.

"If it is friends," thought Maggie, her hopes reviving, "I can call to them, and will if I die the next moment."

But, alas, vain hope! As if he had anticipated her very thoughts, a savage tore a couple of strips from his blanket and bound them over the mouths of both the girls so tight they could scarcely breathe.

They struggled desperately to remove the bandages, but their hands were held at their back in such a painful position that they could scarcely move a muscle; and so they were compelled to yield to the brute force of their inhuman captors. They were not deprived of their sight, however, and, turning their faces toward the river, they beheld a long boat, containing four white persons, creep slowly around the bend above. They recognized the occupants at a glance; they were Sure Shot Seth and his three young companions, Johnson, Pagan and Stewart.

Again Maggie made one last despairing effort to free her mouth, but in vain; and all hope and courage faded from her young heart as she watched the boat with her friends pass down the river and recede from view.

CHAPTER XII.

BEATING UP THE QUARRY.

As Sure Shot Seth and his companions approached the shore where Teddy O'Roop and the young officer stood Seth cried out:

"Oh, Teddy, we cannot say how glad we are to see you alive!"

"Och! and it was by the skin av a hair that you see me at all, at all," returned O'Roop; "but this gentleman," he continued, pointing to the officer, "is Captain Sayton what the red devils are after."

"Captain Sayton," said Seth, leaping ashore and grasping the officer's hand, "I am glad to meet you, though your presence tells me that you are here against your own wishes."

"Quite right, Sure Shot, as I believe my Irish guide told me you were that distinguished young border-

man. I was scouting up toward Lake Luster with a party of ten mounted infantry when my horse was suddenly killed under me by ambuscaded Indians; and it was by mere accident that I escaped on foot to find my way to the river where I fell in with your friend, O'Roop."

"Indeed, captain, these are times that try men's souls. For one week I have been in one trouble after another continually," replied Seth.

"You seem to be all right now," remarked Sayton.

"Not exactly in spirit, captain," Seth answered, "for last night we were compelled to separate from a couple of young girls whom we have been unable to find since."

"And be the Lord! yeess jist passed them," put in Teddy O'Roop.

"Then you know where they are?"

"Sure and I do, Sure Shot; and it's in the hands of three av the divil's own children that they are, this minute."

"I assure you Teddy is right," affirmed Captain Sayton; "we were concealed above here when we saw a canoe with three Indians and two white girls coming up the river. Just before they reached that abrupt bend above they heard you coming and at once concealed themselves along the east shore among the reeds. You passed on, and we would have warned you then, but we dare not. When we were free to act we watched for the boat to appear again. We resolved to attempt their rescue by some means or other. But as they have not left their concealment, and an hour or more has passed since they put into the reeds, I presume they are still there, or else have gone ashore and hurried away."

"Then let us lose no time in getting after them," said Sure Shot, entering the batteau and inviting the captain to a seat with them.

The young officer accepting, they put out from shore into the river.

"Now, we have got to work this matter fine," Seth said, "or our game may dodge us. The main force had better land and keep along the shore, while the other creeps along under cover of the bank with the boat, and have it near should it be necessary for us all to take to the river."

They crossed the river, and Sure Shot Seth, Captain Sayton, young Pagan and Johnson landed, Teddy and Stewart remaining in the boat. The advance was at once begun, and with all the caution possible. Seth led the way, and in a few minutes they came within sight of the reeds where the foe had hidden; and there, true enough, lay the boat with the three red-skins and their two white captives. The heads of the former were erect, like those of some wild animals. They instinctively detected danger in the air; but seemed in doubt from whence it came. The maidens sat entwined in each other's arms, apparently in great and terrible grief.

As the whites surveyed the situation, Captain Sayton seized Seth by the arm, and with dilated eyes and excited voice asked:

"Sure Shot, who is that captive looking this way?"

"Her name is Vishnia; that is all I know about her," answered Seth.

"Thank God, it is she!" burst involuntarily from the captain's lips.

"Who, captain?"

"Pardon my excitement, boys; I am quite beside myself. But that girl is Miss Ida Heath, of—of—well, no matter where."

"Well, now, captain, that embarrassment tells me that Vishnia is more than a mere acquaintance to you."

The dip of Teddy's paddle coming around the bend, put a stop to their whispered conversation, and warned them that the time for action had come.

There were but three rifles in the party, but Captain Sayton was provided with a brace of revolvers, and at a given signal the four charged with a yell down toward the water's edge.

The savages fairly bounced in their seats, so sudden was their surprise. First they seized their rifles, but seeing the odds were against them, and that flight by water was an advantage that the enemy could not overcome, they dropped their guns and took up the paddles; but, at this juncture, the "naval force," consisting of Teddy and Gus, put in an appearance for co-operation with the "land forces." A yell announced their appearance on the opposite side of the reeds.

For a moment the savages seemed bewildered, but quickly recovering they took in the situation at a glance. They fixed their eyes upon the captives, and grasped their tomahawks with murderous intent. But, before they could execute their bloody thoughts, every one of them fell dead.

Teddy and Gus then pushed through the reeds, and, running alongside the Indian's boat, greeted the maidens with words of cheer and triumph, while a shout of joy rose from the shore.

Teddy towed the boat to the bank and the maidens landed, though scarcely able to stand.

The handsome uniform of Captain Sayton caught the eyes of the maidens, and as Vishnia scanned the face beneath the brim of the soldier's cap, a cry of joy burst from her lips, and she rushed into the captain's arms.

"Oh, Charlie!" she cried, forgetting all else in that moment of bliss.

"Ida, my darling," murmured the young officer, imprinting a kiss upon her brow.

And thus Vishnia and her lover met.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WONDERFUL RESCUE.

SETH and his friends saw that Maggie and Vishnia were suffering with hunger and exhaustion, and at

once took measures for their relief. Teddy and Rube were sent out in search of game for food, while the others selected a favorable spot for a camp, and lighted a fire.

The maidens comfortably seated, Seth and Captain Sayton entertained them in a manner calculated to revive their spirits and strengthen their courage. The captain proved a very interesting companion, and after a general epitome of events, he and Vishnia became engaged in a private conversation; and while they were talking over the past few months that had separated them, Seth and Maggie were also engaged in sweet communion. What passed between them we will not attempt to record; but that the result was one of infinite pleasure and delight was evident from the radiance and joy that beamed upon their young faces.

Teddy soon came in with a large, fat wild turkey, which was at once dressed and roasted in true hunter style. The savory smell of the meat had sharpened the appetite of the maidens, and when it was placed before them they ate with a keen relish. Never did food taste so luscious to the maidens. It seemed rich enough to tempt the palate of a king, or invoke the envy of an epicurean.

After their meal preparations for departure were at once made; but up to this time Rube Johnson had not returned from his hunt, and grave fears for his safety were entertained. It would never do to go away without him, so they could do nothing but sit down and wait.

Suddenly the rapid firing of rifles stung through the woods, and the war-whoop of Indians followed. This told our friends that danger was approaching, and they were at once compelled to flee; for they were afraid that Rube was being pursued, and in his excitement would return to camp instead of leading the foe in some other direction in order to save the maidens.

They embarked in the bateau for the opposite shore, having first destroyed the Indians' boat.

Crossing the river they landed, and entering the woods pursued their way westward, Seth taking the lead. They were now in a vicinity, every foot of which was familiar to the members of the Boy Brigade. Not over a mile from there was the valley in which their cabin stood, and in hopes of finding it still standing, Seth headed in that direction.

When but a short distance from the place the young rifleman suddenly discovered a number of Indians on a little knoll about two hundred yards in advance of them. The eminence was covered with a spare growth of tall, slender saplings, while underneath was a heavy growth of brush just tall enough to conceal a man. The Indians perceptible, however, were climbing into a tall, straight sapling, trimming off all the branches as they ascended.

"What the mystery does that mean?" asked Captain Sayton.

"Devilment, I assure you," answered Seth. A halt was ordered while they watched the movements of the foe.

There were four Indians climbing the sapling, and when the foremost one was within a few feet of the top, he stopped and looked down at his companions. The slender bush, already swaying under its load, inclined down the hill, and the moment the warrior looked down, it seemed a signal for the redskins all to throw themselves on one side, which they did, when the sapling bent gracefully over until its top touched the earth.

The redskins all disappeared in the undergrowth, and only the graceful arch of the sapling was visible.

"Heavens, but we've lost a good chance for a shot," lamented Teddy R. Roop.

"We may have a chance yet, Ted," returned Seth, "for I'm of the opinion that that movement means mischief of some kind."

"I am inclined to think there are a number of Indians in that thicket," Sayton said, "judging from the movement of the bushes."

"My God! look there!" suddenly burst from Sure Shot's lips; "it is as I had expected."

They all saw the sapling spring back almost to its former position, pulling up with it, between heaven and earth, a human form that had been attached to it by means of a slender cord or rope. The rope had been tied to the victim's feet and then to the tip end of the sapling, which, bending slightly, held him beyond reach of limb or shrub.

From their position our friends could see the unfortunate man's arms beating the air and struggling in all the activity of life.

The maidens turned their faces to avert the horrible sight.

From away off in the woods came the long howl of a wolf.

Sure Shot started, for there was something familiar in the intonations that droned through the woods.

The bark of a fox answered the wolf.

Again Seth, and Teddy, too, started and exchanged quick, inquiring glances.

"By the blessed Virgin! and I believe the Boy Brigade is near!" Teddy exclaimed.

"I know it is, Ted, and that man hanging yonder is none other than our friend, Joyful Jim."

A cry of distress burst from Vishnia's lips at these words.

"Is there no hope for him?" she cried.

"But little, Vishnia," answered Seth, "but I shall make an effort. Teddy, lead these folks south toward the old spring and there wait; Gus, give me your rifle, for I find it is a trusty piece."

Teddy led the captain and maidens away toward the spring, while Seth, Ches and Gus remained where they were.

The savages on the knoll had now become bolste-

rous in their inhuman treatment of the old border man, and were hurling stones, clubs and even tomahawks through the air at the dangling form.

"Now, boys," said Seth, "I shall try my skill as a rifleman in behalf of old Jim."

"You don't mean to slay him, do you?" asked Pagan.

Seth made no answer, but raising the rifle—a trusty Sharp's—he leveled it toward the knoll, ran his eye along the barrel, and pressed the trigger.

Simultaneous with the report, old Joyful Jim was seen to drop to the earth like a stone; while the sapling whipped the air, as, relieved of its load, it sprung back to its perpendicular.

"I did it, as I live!" cut the rope that suspended him!" exclaimed Seth, highly elated at his wonderful exploit in marksmanship.

Before any report could be had from the knoll, the discharge of firearms to the north, and down the western side of the eminence, startled the woods with a thousand reverberations.

"Thank God, the Brigade is near!" exclaimed Seth, as down along the forest hills sounded those peculiar cries of his different followers, while over from the knoll came groans of agony and yells of savage dismay.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A GRAND REUNION AND GOOD-BY.

DUSKY forms were seen darting rapidly along the ridge, evidently fleeing from the deadly aim of their invincible foe.

Seth and his two companions hurried across to the knoll to look after old Jim, having first announced his presence by a signal to his friends scattered through the surrounding woods.

The trio soon reached the scene of tragedy, where a sad, ghastly, and laughable sight combined, was presented to their view.

A couple of savages lay dead before them; three others were writhing in all the horrible agonies of death, and in their midst sat old Joyful Jim, with a serio-comical expression upon his face that would have provoked a smile from the soberest judge on earth. He was looking around him like one bewildered, while he held on with a terrible gripe to some tufts of grass, and braced himself upon the earth as though he were about to be hurled from a giddy height.

"Hallo, there, Jim, what's the matter with you?" Seth exclaimed, as he approached the old man.

Jim started and gazed wildly about him; then Seth discovered that he had been partially stunned by his fall, and that he was out of his mind.

Suddenly one of the Boy Brigade came bounding into the thicket and seized Seth by the hand.

"Thank the Lord, old friend, we are permitted to meet again, sound and well!" he exclaimed, joyfully.

"It's by the skin of a hair, as Teddy says, that I am here, my dear friend, Justin," returned Sure Shot.

"Teddy?" exclaimed Justin Gray; "is Teddy alive, too?"

"Yes, and with Maggie and Vishnia near this point."

"Seth, can all this be true?"

"It is a solemn fact."

Justin uttered a shout of joy.

And now, one by one, the Brigade came up, hailing the presence of their young leader with deafening shouts of joy.

The presence of Gus Stewart and Ches Pagan, the known companions of Ivan Le Clercq, caused the Brigade no little surprise; but Seth briefly explained their attitude toward them, and received the best wishes and congratulations of the boys for the change they had made in their conduct.

Meanwhile, old Jim sat muttering incoherently to himself, but finally he started up with an exclamation and an odd oath, and rubbing his eyes and gazing around him asked:

"Boys, how's this, now?"

An explanation was not necessary, for in a moment more Jim's mind was clear; and rising to his feet he gave the Indian lying before him a startled glance, then advanced and greeted Seth with a shake of the hand and a hearty, good-natured laugh.

"Strikes me you were in a predicament, Jim," said Sure Shot, smiling.

"Wal, I reckon as what I had a teter in the clouds, and if the string hadn't a' broke, I reckon them superbumfusticated vampires 'd a' seen the last of Joyful James. But, great Jehovah, boys! When I drapped from up thar I fell plump on a redskin, and butted—drove—jammed him clear down to the antytods; and it came dimmed nigh splatterin' me all over this woods. It war only the adhesiveness of the bony structures of my cerebellum that kept me from squashin'."

But Seth—Sure Shot—friend March, I am monstrously de-lighted to see you among us once more. I was afraid that young hushant of a Hawk-Eyes had got the dead wood on you this time; but seein' he didn't, I will be safe in sayin' he'll never—no, never, bother us again."

"Why not?" asked Seth.

"Owing to the attraction of gravitation, invented by that great, good and jolly old philosopher, Sir Isaker Newton, he came to his death, and—"

"What! do you mean to say Hawk-Eyes has been killed?"

"Yes; as I war goin' to observe," said Jim, with a gesture, "by means of that invention of old Ike's, I war forced downward to'rds the yearth when that string broke with me, and as luck would have it, I gravitated onto the chief's head and broke his on-grateful neck, tharby cheatin' the gallowas. Turn that karkies over thar and you'll see that what I have said is as true as the solar system is perfect."

The boys did as directed, and when the body,

which had lain face downward, was turned, as looked upon the face of Ivan Le Clercq.

Young Stewart and Pagan were deeply affected by sight of the dead face of him who had once been their companion and leader. They shuddered as they thought of their own narrow escape from the sin which had ended the life of Ivan; and they thanked Heaven for the moral courage that enabled them to overcome their fears and turn into the path of right and honor. And, too, the face of poor Abe Thorne rose before them, and tears of grief and sorrow filled their eyes when they thought of his poor, childless mother, who would watch in vain for his coming. But they knew not that, at that very moment, Abe's mother lay silent in death—a victim to savage vengeance.

Old Neptune and Mr. Harris soon joined the party, and when the presence of Seth was discovered, a scene of great excitement ensued. Eager to receive some tidings of their daughters, they plied him with a dozen questions before he could answer one. But when he broke to them the glad news, that both were safe, they wept with joy.

Sure Shot finally led the party to where Teddy and Captain Sayton, with the maidens, were in waiting. Then ensued another scene of joyful reunion.

"Gosh a mighty!" exclaimed old Jim, looking on with delight, "it's better'n a camp-meetin'; and dog my cats if I don't wish I had a darter or a—sweetheart to embrace. If I had, I think my ideal of paradise would be complete. I had a smatterin' taste of love once; but the dratted critter I sweetened on got mad at me and we parted forever. She got mad 'bout nothin' too—jist because I told her she hadn't ort to make a corn-patch of her feet by crowdin' them into number-eight boots and then undertake to kick a fractious cow into submission. But it war all for the best. She married another feller, and now dishes up corn-pone to a cross husband and fifteen children. What parental responsibilities I escaped! Humph! killin' b'ars, bu'stin' Ingins, and gravi'ation are nowhar."

"I see," said Gus Stewart, "that you are still ignorant of the fact that Sure Shot Seth cut the rope that suspended you in mid-air, with a bullet at the distance of nearly two hundred yards."

"You don't tell me!"

"I do; and for a fact."

"I've no more to say 'bout gravitation and the superbumfustic force with which I drapped onto the cerebellum of that Hawk-Eyes imp!"

The distant report of a gun suddenly reminded our friends that peril surrounded them and that delay was dangerous.

From Captain Sayton they learned that the settlers of the Yellow Medicine Agency, or those that had escaped the Indian tomahawk, had fled south and taken refuge at Fort Ridgely; and as this was the nearest point of safety, our friends at once set out for that place.

Shortly after their departure the party were overtaken by Rube Johnson, who had been in considerable trouble with the Indians. His coming left no one behind, and so the party all moved on more cheerfully.

On the way old Neptune revealed his right name and the place of his home; and while his sojourn in the wilds of the North-west had, in the end, been full of great peril and suffering, he did not regret that he had come, for he had been restored to his wonted health and strength.

With the cloud that had once seemed gathering over his powerful brain went all his eccentric notions of submarine navigation; though to have followed up what he had accomplished at Lake Luster might have led to a success and fame equal to that of George Stephenson and Robert Fulton.

Upon one other point the Boy Brigade was enlightened; and that was the queer and even suspicious manner in which Joyful Jim deported himself while around Lake Luster. The fact is, old Jim was in the employ of Neptune as a scout, and secrecy being enjoined upon him, of course he kept it to himself. So it was his voice that Justin Gray and Hooseah, the Indian, heard on the water the night they swam out to Sure Shot's relief; for it was Jim and Neptune that released him from the log.

Although greatly harassed by the savages, our friends finally reached Fort Ridgely, which they found closely beleaguered by the enemy; but, assailed by the indomitable Boy Brigade, the savages were compelled to raise the siege, withdrawing in the direction of New Ulm.

Old Neptune and his daughter soon returned to their old home, where, a few years later—when the war had ended—Captain Sayton claimed the hand of the fair Vishnia in the bonds of wedlock.

Mr. Harris took his daughter south, beyond all dangers of Indian invasion, where, in company with her friend, Emma Milbank, and the other women of the Yellow Medicine Agency, she spent the summer, while he went back to fight under the banner of her lover, Sure Shot Seth.

The Boy Brigade rendered inestimable service during the terrible Minnesota war, and although it was in many hard-fought battles, and lost some of its members, its gallant young leader, Sure Shot Seth, passed through the hottest of all onslaughts, to fall meekly into the ranks of married men, and become one of the most devoted of husbands to one of the most devoted and charming of wives—Maggie Harris.

THE END.

135 Captain Paul, THE MOONSHINER OF KENTUCKY. By C. D. Clark.

136 Night-Hawk Kit; or, THE DAUGHTER OF THE RANCHE. By Jos. E. Badger, Jr.